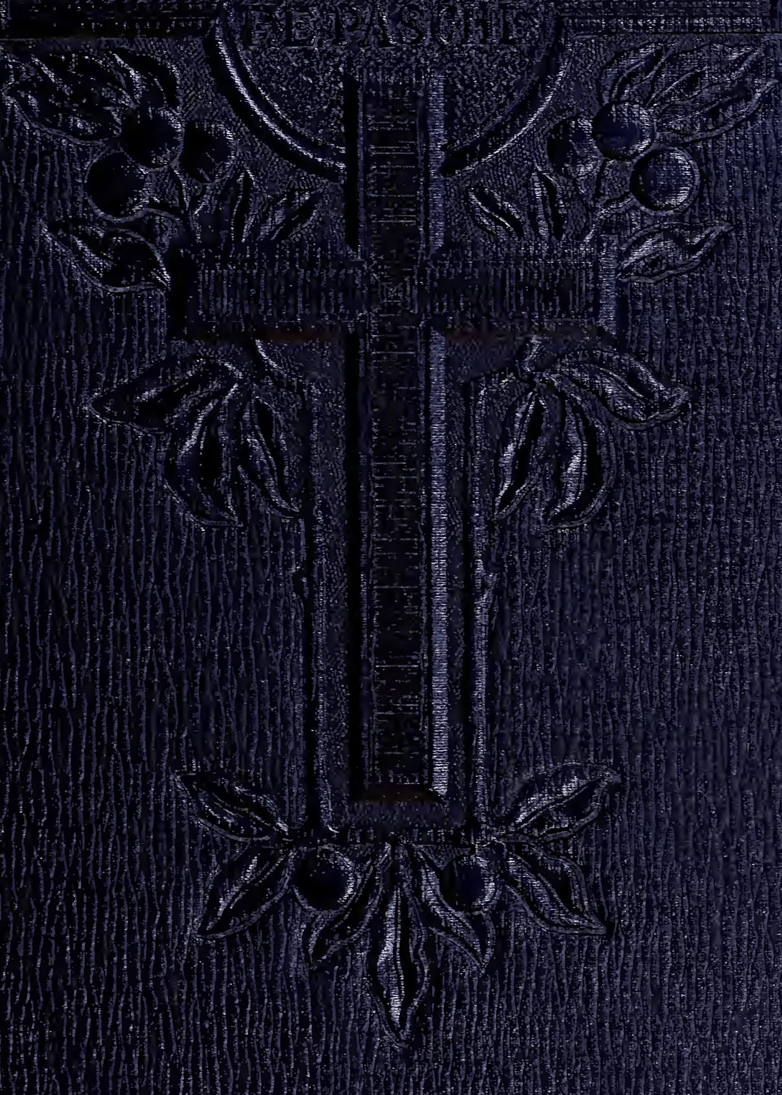
DAILY BREAD

F. E. PASCHE



Daily Bread
or
Home Devotions

By

F. E. PASCHE

Break Thou the bread of life, dear Lord, to me
As Thou didst break the loaves beside the sea.
Bless Thou the truth, O Savior, now to me
As Thou didst bless the bread by Galilee.

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Table of Contents.

PAGE

1. There Is a God 1
2. God Is Eternal 2
3. Materialism, the Outstanding Sign of Our Times 3
4. Why Do Many Not Believe? 4
5. The Soul Longs for Some Great and Lasting Bliss 5
6. I Believe in God 7
7. There Is Only One God 8
8. There Are Three Persons in One Divine Essence 9
9. How the Divine Persons are Distinguished from Each Other... 10
10. The Importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity 12
11. Of Creation 13
12. Evolution Contradicts the Bible 14
13. In Six Days the Lord Made Heaven and Earth 16
14. God Is Omnipotent 17
15. The Good Angels 18
16. The Evil Angels 19
17. Of Satan, the Prince of Evil Spirits 21
18. Of Man 22
19. The Image of God 23
20. God's Preservation of the World 24
21. God Is Omnipresent 26
22. God's Providence 27
23. God's Government of the World 28
24. God Turns Evil unto Good for His Children 29
25. Purely out of Fatherly, Divine Goodness and Mercy 31
26. God Is Benevolent, Merciful, and Gracious 32
27. What It Is to Believe in God 33
28. Unbelief, the Most Heinous Sin 34
29. Our Religion, or the Christian Faith 36
30. The Christian Faith was Darkened before the Reformation.... 37
31. With the Reformation a New Era Dawned 38
32. Luther and the Bible 39
33. The Lutheran Church 41
34. The Public Confessions Are the Standard of Doctrine in the Lutheran Church 42
35. Our Small Catechism 43
36. The Augsburg Confession 45
37. Why Do We Call Ourselves Lutherans? 46
38. The Holy Scriptures 47
39. It Stood the Severest Tests and All the Storms of Time....... 49
40. Divine Inspiration 50
41. Our English Version of the Bible 51
42. "Search the Scriptures." 52

PAGE
43. Properties of the Bible 54
44. Scripture Admits of No Compromise 55
45. The Bible Is Genuine and Trustworthy 56
46. Human Reason Must Submit to the Word of God 58
47. The Purpose of the Bible 59
48. The Bible Must Be the Only Rule and Guide of Faith and Life 60
49. The Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine 62
50. The Ten Commandments 63
51. The First Commandment 64
52. We Should Fear, Love, and Trust in, God Above All Things 66
53. The Second Commandment 67
54. The Sin of Cursing 68
55. Swearing by God's Name 69
56. Using Witchcraft and Spiritism 71
57. Lying or Deceiving by God's Name 72
58. We Should Call upon God's Name in Every Trouble, Pray, Praise, and Give Thanks 73
59. The Third Commandment 75
60. We Should Hold Preaching and God's Word Sacred and Gladly Hear and Learn It 76
61. A Warning Example for Us All 77
62. The Word of God Is the Foundation of True Christian Faith 79
63. Nothing Must Hinder Us from Hearing the Word of God...... 80
64. Christ Is the Center of Every True Service 81
65. Family Worship 83
66. Spiritual Songs 84
67. Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself 85
68. The Fourth Commandment 87
69. The Duty of Parents 88
70. Of Civil Government 89
71. The Separation of Church and State 91
72. Religious Liberty 92
73. The Duty of Loyal Citizens 93
74. The Christians Are the Pillars of a Nation 95
75. The Special Promise of the Fourth Commandment 96
76. The Fifth Commandment 97
77. Beware of Sinful Anger! 99
78. We Should Help and Befriend Our Neighbor in Every Bodily Need 100
79. The Sixth Commandment 101
80. Holy Wedlock Is a Lifelong Union 103
81. The Matrimonial Estate was Instituted by God Himself 104
82. A Rightful Betrothal Must Not be Broken 105
83. The Home of a Truly Christian Married Couple 107
84. Marriage was Instituted for the Propagation of the Human Race 108
85. We Should Lead a Chaste and Decent Life 109
86. How to Test Amusements 111
87. The Seventh Commandment 112
88. True Riches 113

PAGE
89. We Should Pray, Work, and Help Our Neighbor 114
90. The Folly of Those who for Fear of Earthly Losses Will Not Follow Christ 116
91. The Eighth Commandment 117
92. The Sin of Lying 118
93. A Christian Should Not Go to Law with His Brother 120
94. Judging and Condemning Others 121
95. We Should Defend Our Neighbor, Speak Well of Him, and Put the Best Construction on Everything 122
96. The Ninth and Tenth Commandments 124
97. Contentment Makes Truly Happy 125
98. The Whole Law Must be Kept by the Whole Man During His Whole Life 126
99. Love Is the Sum of All Commandments 128
100. The Close of the Commandments 129
101. God Is Just 130
102. The Destruction of Jerusalem an Example of God's Wrath against Sin 132
103. Of Death 133
104. Triumphant Songs of Faith in View of Death 134
105. Can We Keep God's Commandments Perfectly? 135
106. Can Man be Saved by the Law? 137
107. The Purpose and Uses of the Law 138
108. Our Keeping of the Commandments Pleases God 139
109. Why Must the Law be Preached in All Its Severity? 141
110. Of Sin 142
111. All Men Have Original Sin 143
112. What Did Original Sin Bring to Us? 145
113. What Is Actual Sin? 146
114. Sins of Weakness 147
115. Mortal Sins 148
116. The Sin against the Holy Ghost 150
117. How Boundless and Appalling Sin Is 151
118. How We are Made Free from Sin 152
119. What the Gospel Is 153
120. The Difference between the Law and the Gospel 155
121. The Different Relations of Men to the Law 156
122. Testimonies for the Truth of the Gospel 157
123. Jesus Is the Promised Messiah 159
124. All the Prophets Testified of Christ 160
125. Christ's Birth at Bethlehem 161
126. Jesus Came as the Savior of All People 163
127. Jesus Wrought Great Miracles 164
128. Jesus Christ Is True God 165
129. Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages 166
130. Jesus Christ Is Also True Man 168
131. Christ Is God and Man in One Person 169

PAGE
132. Christ's Human Nature Partakes of the Majesty of His Divine Nature 170
133. Both Natures in Christ Active in the Work of Our Redemption 172
134. Jesus, the Mediator Between God and Men 173
135. Jesus, Our Treasure and Pearl of Great Price 174
136. The Work of Redemption through Christ 176
137. His Life of Deep Humiliation 177
138. He was Made under the Law 178
139. Christ's Innocent Suffering and Death 179
140. Christ Suffered and Died as Our Substitute 181
141. Ponder the Immeasurable Love of God to Us Damnable Sinners! 182
142. Whom Did Christ Redeem? 183
143. Christ Redeemed Us from All Sins 185
144. Christ Redeemed Us from Death 186
145. Christ Redeemed Us from the Power of the Devil 187
146. Wherewith Did Christ Redeem You? 189
147. Jesus Is Our Good Shepherd 190
148. The Purpose of His Redemption 191
149. Confessing Christ 193
150. We Have Peace with God through Our Lord Jesus Christ..... 194
151. The Joy of a Christian 195
152. Our Blessed State of Grace 197
153. Our Heavenly Possession 198
154. The Blessed, Pious Life 199
155. Love Is the Fruit of Faith 201
156. What Assurance Have We that We Are Redeemed? 202
157. The God-Man's State of Exaltation 203
158. His Descent into Hell 205
159. His Resurrection from the Dead 206
160. Christ's Ascension into Heaven 207
161. The Christian Following Christ to Heaven 209
162. Christ's Sitting at the Right Hand of God 210
163. He Gave Gifts unto Men 211
164. Do Not Abuse Your Christian Liberty 213
165. His Return to Judge the Quick and the Dead 214
166. The Last Day a Day of Joy for All True Christians 215
167. The Signs of the Times Point to the End of the World...... 217
168. Chiliasm Is a Dream 218
169. The Antichrist Prophesied in Second Thessalonians has Come.. 219
170. Christ Our Prophet 221
171. Christ Our High Priest 222
172. We Must Build Our Souls and Doctrine on Christ, the Only Sure Foundation 224
173. Christ Our King 225
174. Behold, Thy King Cometh unto Thee! 226
175. Of Sanctification 228
176. Who Is the Holy Ghost? 229
177. The Deplorable Condition of Natural Man in Spiritual Things 231

PAGE
178. The Holy Ghost Works Our Conversion and Enlightens Us 232
179. The Holy Ghost Brings Us to Faith in Christ 233
180. The Holy Ghost Brings Us to Faith in Christ through the Gospel 235
181. Regeneration and Conversion Is in No Wise Our Own Merit... 236
182. The Holy Ghost Also Gives Us Power to Do Good Works.... 237
183. Losing the Faith 239
184. By the Gospel the Holy Ghost Keeps Us in the True Faith... 240
185. Why Is It that Not All Men are Brought to Faith and Salvation through the Gospel? 241
186. Let Us Walk in the Spirit 243
187. The Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints 244
188. I Am the Vine, Ye Are the Branches 245
189. In the Visible Church There Is Much Rubbish 246
190. Which Is the True Visible Church? 248
191. The Authority of the Church 249
192. What Is the Business of the Church? 250
193. The Unity of the Christian Church 251
194. We Should All Be Laborers in the Church 253
195. Forgiveness of Sins, or Justification 254
196. The Prodigal Son 255
197. Justification, Not by Our Works, But by Grace, the Chief Article of the Christian Faith 257
198. This Article of the Christian Church Distinguishes It from All False Religions 258
199. Justification by Grace Gives All the Glory to God Alone..... 259
200. This Doctrine Affords Enduring Comfort to Poor Sinners..... 261
201. Secret Societies, or Lodges 262
202. The Resurrection of the Body 263
203. Eternal Life 264
204. Of Eternal Damnation 266
205. Our Hope of Entering Heaven Is a Certain Hope 267
206. Why Is It that But Few are Chosen? 268
207. It Is a Good Thing that the Heart be Established 270
208. Christians Have True Comfort in Life and Death 271
209. All True Christians Pray 272
210. How, When, and Where Shall We Pray? 274
211. For Whom and What Should We Pray? 275
212. What Should Induce Us to Pray? 276
213. To Whom We Should Pray 278
214. God Is a Spirit 279
215. Our Father, Who Art in Heaven 280
216. We Should Thank God that He Made Us His Children 281
217. Become as Little Children in Simplicity of Faith and in Trustful Confidence 283
218. Hallowed Be Thy Name 284
219. Thy Kingdom Come 285
220. Take a Lively Interest in the Work for God's Kingdom...... 287
221. Thy Will be Done on Earth as It Is in Heaven 288

PAGE
222. God's Gracious Will when He Afflicts Us with Illness 289
223. Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread 291
224. Beware of the Cares of This Life! 292
225. We Should Receive God's Gifts with Thanksgiving 293
226. It Is Foolish and Heathenish to Torture Ourselves with Care for the Future 295
227. And Forgive Us Our Trespasses, as We Forgive Those who Trespass Against Us 296
228. And Lead Us Not into Temptation 297
229. Avoid Bad Company 299
230. But Deliver Us from Evil 300
231. What Are God's Intentions when He Suffers Us to Endure Evil? 301
232. The Conclusion of the Lord's Prayer 303
233. The Word "Amen" 304
234. The Promise Given to Prayer 305
235. The Means of Grace 307
236. The Power of God's Word 308
237. The Holy Sacraments 309
238. What Is Baptism? 311
239. The Modes of Baptizing 312
240. Who Has the Right to Baptize? 313
241. Who is to be Baptized? 315
242. Infant Baptism 316
243. Sponsors 317
244. The Benefits of Baptism 319
245. The Power of Baptism 320
246. What Baptism Signifies 321
247. Our Baptismal Vow 323
248. Confirmation 324
249. Be Steadfast in Serving the Triune God, and Him Only...... 325
250. Remember that God Is Omniscient 327
251. The Chief Cause of Backsliding 328
252. The Office of the Keys 330
253. The Office of the Keys Is the Only Office in the Church 331
254. To Whom the Office of the Keys is Given 332
255. How the Office of the Keys is Exercised 334
256. Brotherly Admonition 335
257. How is an Excommunicated Person to be Dealt with when He Is Penitent? 336
258. To-day, if Ye Will Hear His Voice, Harden Not Your Hearts 338
259. Excommunication is Not Intended for the Perdition, but for the Salvation of the Soul 339
260. What Is a Christian Congregation? 341
261. Do Not Refuse to Serve the Lord 342
262. Why Should All Christians Join a Truly Christian Congregation? 343
263. The Christian Ministry is Divinely Instituted 345
264. Pastors are Called and Installed by the Congregation 346
265. Who Are Faithful Ministers, or Pastors? 347

PAGE
266. What the Hearers Owe to Their Pastors 349
267. Follow God's Word; Follow It Alone 350
268. What Is Confession? 351
269. Return unto the Lord, Thy God! 353
270. Absolution 354
271. Do Also Hypocrites Receive Forgiveness? 355
272. Beware of Merely Nominal Christianity 357
273. Consider Your Station According to the Ten Commandments... 358
274. Avoid Sinning Against Conscience 359
275. The General Confession 361
276. Confessing My Sins to My Neighbor 362
277. How a Christian Should Heartily Forgive Those Who Offend Him 363
278. Let Our Confession Be in Earnest 365
279. We Should Not Doubt God's Forgiveness 366
280. God Is Faithful 368
281. Having Received Forgiveness, We Must Amend Our Sinful Lives 369
282. The Institution of the Sacrament of the Altar 370
283. What Christ Gives Us in the Holy Supper 371
284. The Words "This Is My Body," "This Is My Blood," Must Not be Taken in a Figurative Sense 373
285. Papacy's False Doctrine of the Lord's Supper 374
286. The True Lutheran, Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Supper.... 376
287. Why This Sacrament Should be Administered to the End of Days 377
288. The Benefit of the Lord's Supper 378
289. For What Purpose, Then, Do We Approach the Lord's Table? 380
290. Why Should We Frequently Partake of This Sacrament? 381
291. Especially Those who Have a Weak Faith Should Go to the Lord's Supper 382
292. The Power of the Lord's Supper 384
293. The Salutary Use of the Sacrament 385
294. Who Is Unworthy to Approach the Lord's Table? 386
295. Self-Examination Necessary Before Partaking of Holy Communion 388
296. The Church's Duty to Insure a Worthy Reception of the Sacrament 389
297. Be Not Yoked Together with Unbelievers 390
298. Behold the Holiness of God! 392
299. Love Not the World 393
300. "Beware of False Prophets!" 394
301. Practising Close Communion Is Eminently Charitable 396
302. This Supper Serves to Further Us in Holiness of Life 397
303. By Partaking of This Sacrament We Confess Our Faith 398
304. Christians Are the Salt of the Earth 400
305. Christians Are the Light of the World 401
306. Preach the Gospel to Every Creature 402
307. It Is the Duty of Every Christian to Do Mission-Work 404
308. Christian Beneficence 405
309. Our Lutheran Forefathers 406
310. A Synod and Its Work 408
311. The Importance of Parochial Schools 409

PAGE
312. Youth Is the Most Favorable Season to Begin a Christian Life 410
313. Our Colleges and Seminaries 412
314. What Kind of Men We Need 413
315. Our Mission-Fields 414
316. Christ's Charge to All His Followers to Be Witnesses to Him 415
317. "Lo, I Am with You Alway" 417
318. "O Give Thanks unto the Lord!" 418
Morning Prayers 420
Evening Prayers 420
Grace Before Meal 422
Grace After Meal 422
The Lord's Prayer 422

Index of Scripture Passages.

OLD TESTAMENT.

PAGE
Gen. 1, 27 23
1, 28 108
2, 18 104
8, 21 4
9, 6 97
15, 1 7
29, 20. 21 105
50, 20 29
Ex. 20, 5. 6 129
20, 11 16
Deut. 5, 32 350
6, 4 8
6, 6. 7 62
18, 10. 11 71
18, 15 221
1 Chron. 29, 11 303
Job 14, 4 135
Ps. 1, 1 390
5, 4 132
14, 1 1
19, 12 361
26, 8 80
27, 4 77
32, 5 365
33, 4 .... 56. 368
37, 4 195
48, 10 67
50, 14 323
50, 15 276
62, 10 113
73, 25. 26 271
90, 2 2
103, 1. 2 418
103, 2 370
103, 2. 3 257
103, 13 31

PAGE
Ps. 110, 1 210
111, 10 63
116, 12 397
118, 1 .... 92. 293
119, 1 139
119, 11 138
119, 72 261
119, 105 51
119, 160 54
126, 3 408
130, 3. 4 366
139, 14 22
145, 9 32
145, 18. 19 272
Prov. 3, 5 66
16, 9 28
19, 5 117
28, 13 354
Eccl. 5, 1 75
12, 1 410
Is. 6, 3 392
8, 20 39
26, 10 355
34, 16 60
42, 3 382
49, 8 38
53, 5 179
60, 2 37
Jer. 1, 19 417
23, 24 327
23, 31 72
48, 10 287
Ezek. 33, 11 339
Dan. 9, 7 130
Hos. 13, 9 231
14, 4 353

NEW TESTAMENT.

Matt. 4, 10 .... 64. 278
5, 7 100
5, 8 109
5, 13 400
5, 14 401
5, 22 91
5, 37 69
6, 33 291
6, 34 295
7, 6 389
7, 12 85
7, 15 394

Matt. 7, 21 357
10, 29. 30 289
10, 32 .... 42. 193
12, 31 150
13, 44—46 174
13, 47. 48 246
15, 19 .... 101. 146
16, 18 166
16, 26 5
18, 3 283
18, 16 317
18, 18. 20 332

PAGE

- Matt. 18, 20 341
  - 19, 6 103
  - 20, 16 268
  - 21, 9 226
  - 22, 21 91
  - 23, 8 249
  - 25, 41 19
  - 26, 26. 27 384
  - 26, 27 374
  - 26, 28 378
  - 26, 41 147. 297
  - 28, 19 250. 315
  - 28, 19. 20 307
  - 28, 20 26. 41. 248
- Mark 11, 26 296
  - 16, 15. 16 402
  - 16, 16 34
- Luke 1, 37 17
  - 2, 10. 11 161
  - 6, 37 363
  - 6, 48 224
  - 10, 16 81
  - 11, 28 76
  - 16, 23 266
  - 16, 29 331
  - 21, 28 215
  - 21, 33 49
  - 22, 19 381
- John 1, 14 168
  - 3, 5 285
  - 3, 5. 6 316
  - 3, 6 143
  - 3, 36 198
  - 4, 24 279
  - 4, 35 414
  - 5, 28 263
  - 5, 39 52
  - 8, 31. 32 55
  - 10, 27. 28 264
  - 11, 25. 26 206
  - 14, 26 229
  - 15, 5 245
  - 15, 27 415
  - 16, 23 274. 305
  - 17, 17 284
  - 18, 36 218
  - 18, 37 225
  - 20, 23 330
- Acts 1, 26 346
  - 2, 47 343
  - 3, 15 172
  - 3, 19 151. 255. 338
  - 5, 38. 39 46
  - 7, 51 241
  - 10, 38 159
  - 10, 43 160
  - 17, 31 214
  - 20, 28 345
  - 22, 16 312

PAGE

- Rom. 1, 4 164
  - 1, 16 153
  - 3, 18 3
  - 3, 20 358
  - 4, 5 254
  - 4, 25 202
  - 5, 1 194
  - 6, 4 321
  - 6, 23 133
  - 7, 5. 6 156
  - 7, 7 141
  - 8, 28 95
  - 8, 38. 39 267
  - 9, 5 169
  - 10, 4 152
  - 10, 14 235
  - 10, 17 79
  - 11, 36 12
  - 13, 1 89
  - 13, 7 93
  - 13, 9 124
  - 13, 10 128
  - 16, 17 258
- 1 Cor. 1, 8 380
  - 4, 1 313
  - 4, 2 347
  - 6, 1 120
  - 6, 11 228. 320
  - 10, 12 328
  - 10, 16 376
  - 10, 17 398
  - 10, 23 213
  - 10, 33 116
  - 11, 24. 25 371
  - 11, 26 377
  - 11, 27 396
  - 11, 28 388
  - 11, 29 386
  - 12, 3 233
  - 14, 20 148
  - 15, 57 134
- 2 Cor. 1, 20 304
  - 2, 7. 8 336
  - 3, 5 236
  - 3, 6 155
  - 4, 6 232
  - 5, 15 199
  - 5, 21 181
  - 6, 17 262
  - 10, 5 58
  - 13, 5 385
  - 13, 14 9
- Gal. 3, 13 176
  - 3, 15 373
  - 3, 26. 27 319
  - 4, 5 178
  - 4, 6 10
  - 5, 6 201
  - 5, 25 243

PAGE
Gal. 6, 1 ... 335
6, 6 ... 349
6, 9 ... 412
6, 10 ... 405
Eph. 1, 7 ... 36. 259
2, 3 ... 145
2, 10 ... 237
3, 12 ... 33
4, 3 ... 251
4, 4—6 ... 244
4, 6 ... 280
4, 8 ... 211
4, 10 ... 207
4, 24 ... 369
4, 25 ... 118
6, 2. 3 ... 96
6, 4 ... 88. 409
Phil. 1, 6 ... 288
2, 7. 8 ... 177
2, 9 ... 203
3, 20 ... 209
4, 8 ... 111
Col. 1, 16 ... 18
3, 16 ... 83. 84
3, 17 ... 73
3, 20 ... 87
1 Thess. 4, 6 ... 112
2 Thess. 2, 3. 4 ... 219
3, 10 ... 114
1 Tim. 1, 15 ... 183
2, 1 ... 275
2, 5 ... 173
4, 8 ... 107
6, 6 ... 125
6, 8 ... 292
6, 12 ... 324
2 Tim. 1, 10 ... 186
1, 12 ... 270
2, 15 ... 47. 59
3, 16 ... 50
4, 18 ... 300

PAGE
Titus 3, 5 ... 311
Heb. 1, 3 ... 24
4, 12 ... 308
5, 4 ... 334
7, 26. 27 ... 222
10, 38 ... 239
11, 3 ... 14
12, 11 ... 301
13, 7 ... 406
Jas. 2, 10 ... 137
3, 8 ... 121
3, 10 ... 68
5, 16 ... 362
1 Pet. 1, 5 ... 240
1, 19 ... 189
2, 2 ... 43
2, 3 ... 309
2, 9 ... 404
3, 15 ... 45
3, 15. 16 ... 359
3, 18. 19 ... 205
4, 7 ... 217
4, 8 ... 122
4, 10 ... 253. 342
5, 7 ... 27
5, 8 ... 21
5, 8. 9 ... 413
1 John 1, 7 ... 170. 185
1, 8 ... 126
1, 9 ... 351
2, 2 ... 163
2, 15. 16 ... 393
3, 1 ... 197. 281
3, 4 ... 142
3, 8 ... 187
4, 9. 10 ... 182
5, 9. 10 ... 157
5, 20 ... 165
Rev. 2, 10 ... 325
4, 11 ... 13
5, 9 ... 191

1. There Is a God.

The fool hath said in his heart, There is no God. *Ps. 14, 1.*

The existence of God becomes clear to every thoughtful man through contemplation of the universe. Speaking of the heathen nations, St. Paul says in his Epistle to the Romans: "That which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God has showed it unto them. For the invisible things of Him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead." David says in the 19th Psalm: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament showeth His handiwork." All ancient nations agreed in this, that there is a God, a Supreme Being, whom they felt in duty bound to seek, to honor, and to worship.

To deny the existence of God is no mark of superior intelligence. To deny that there is a Creator is not solving a mystery, but creating one. It is doing violence not only to God's Book, but also to man's reason. Scripture says: "The *fool* hath said in his heart, There is no God." As the fear of God is the beginning of all wisdom, so disregard of God is the beginning of all folly. A noted French astronomer, Lalande, is said to have pointed his telescope to the heavens and, not seeing God, to have asserted, "There is no God!" That was foolish. His reasoning was just as nonsensical as that of the little boy who wanted to find out where the sweet song of the singing bird was hidden. He killed the bird, but did not find the song. To learn about the existence of God, one must use the right method. Which is this method? Scripture says: The invisible things of God are clearly seen in the works of creation. These works of creation speak a language so plain that all can understand it and ought to feel constrained to confess: There must have been a Maker of the universe. "For every house is built by some one; but He that built all things is God."

Prayer.

O God, I lift mine eyes up to Thee, from whom alone my help cometh; my help cometh from the Lord, who hath made heaven and earth. To Thee I entrust myself, body and soul, to be Thine own with all I have and possess. To Thee alone I look, in Thee I trust, my hope rests with Thee; there is no help with man. Amen.

Then let us adore Him
And give Him His right,
All glory and power,
And wisdom and might;

All honor and blessing,
With angels above,
And thanks never ceasing,
And infinite love.

2. God Is Eternal.

Before the mountains were brought forth or ever Thou hadst formed the earth and the world, even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. *Ps. 90, 2.*

These words are the beginning of the oldest psalm in the Bible. They state that God is an eternal God. With Him there is no yesterday and no to-morrow; with Him there is no time. To every other being we attribute a beginning; even the ancient hills had a beginning at the time of creation; the angels had a beginning, Not so God; He is from everlasting to everlasting; without beginning, without end. He never began to be and never will cease to be. He is the King eternal, immortal. He never grows older, never dies.

Therefore in God there never is a change; lapse of days and years and centuries does not affect Him. He lives in an everlasting to-day. He is a God "with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning," as St. James says. He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Otherwise we see that everything changes in the world, and everything finally comes to an end. "But Thou art the same, and Thy years shall have no end," we read Ps. 102, 27. God says of Himself: "I am that I am." God cannot change. Therefore He is our Refuge throughout all generations.

Because God is eternal, also His Word shall remain forever, as He says: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." And therefore it is also true what David sings in the 103d Psalm: "But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear Him and His righteousness unto children's children to such as keep His covenant."

And because God is eternal, we, too, do not hope in vain for the eternal life which He has promised us. The children of God shall partake of the eternal bliss of their God and Father in heaven.

Prayer.

I commit myself this day and all the days of my life to Thee, O God, the eternal Father, who hast created me; to Thee, O God, the eternal Son, who hast redeemed me; and to Thee, O God, the Holy Ghost, who hast sanctified me when I was baptized in Thy name and enlightened me by the Gospel with Thy gifts, so that I know Jesus as my Savior, trust and believe, rejoice and take comfort, in Him. O eternal Holy Trinity, render me fit at all times to enter eternal bliss by keeping me steadfast in the true faith. Amen.

All praise and thanks to God
The Father now be given,
The Son, and Him who reigns
With them in highest heaven —

The one eternal God,
Whom earth and heaven adore;
For thus it was, is now,
And shall be evermore!

3. Materialism, the Outstanding Sign of Our Times.

There is no fear of God before their eyes. *Rom. 3, 18.*

What is materialism? It is the tendency to have undue regard for material interests, that is, for the things of this world. Materialism refuses to wait and hope for happiness and bliss in the world to come; it demands heaven here on earth. Our materialistic age desires a savior who is to give them plenty to eat; a savior, not for heaven, but for the earth. This materialism, this commercialism, is the prevailing and predominating characteristic of our times.

It is a question whether in the history of the world these matters have ever bulged out so large as at the present and in our own country. Gaining as much as possible of this earth's goods has become like a whirlpool which draws everything into its devouring current. Money stands for the standard of efficiency and worth and influence among men, so that all are scrambling for it. Show a man a material advantage which he may secure, often at the sacrifice of honesty and principle, and he will be your friend. Now, with men's minds thus set, it is but a natural consequence that it should affect their hearts and endanger their spiritual lives. They become less earnest in the things of the Lord, less devout as church-members, less regular in attending the public services. Business responsibilities increase; they say they have no time to go to church; they neglect the eternal interests of their immortal souls, and there is no neglect as shameful as this. Neglect your health, and you will soon suffer; neglect your soul, and you will perish forever. That is the sin of many thousands in our day.

A man lay asleep in a boat on the Niagara River, when, suddenly, he heard the waters thundering down the mighty cataract. He seized a paddle and plied it against the current. It was too late. He went over into certain death. Thus many are sleeping, when, suddenly, they will hear, "Thy soul is required of thee now!"

Prayer.

Help us, good Lord and God, that we may not set our hearts upon things temporal, but that we may with true faith, love, and patience wait for the life to come. O Lord, this world passes away, and all its glory is transient. Besides, our stay in this world lasts but a few days, and these pass by more rapidly than the water current. O lead us on the way to heaven, to Thy glory, where we shall be with Thee forever. Amen.

Jesus, Lover of my soul,
Let me to Thy bosom fly,
While the waters nearer roll,
While the tempest still is high!

Hide me, O my Savior, hide,
Till the storm of life is past;
Safe into the haven guide;
O receive my soul at last!

4. Why Do Many Not Believe?

The imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth. *Gen. 8, 21.*

Why do learned men among the infidels not believe? Certainly not because of their high intellectual standing, but because they do not want to hear the truth. They are ready to believe almost any theory that opposes religion, but they reject the Gospel. Why? The fault lies in their own sinful heart, which cannot bear the truth; since sin entered into the world, man is inclined to think highly of himself and to forget his Maker.

Why is it that so many do not believe in the Lord Jesus? Is it not because they are self-righteous and expect to get to heaven by their own good works, their own righteousness? Is it not because they despise the Lord's grace? Why do they not believe in the Lord Jesus? Is it because of their sincerity and conscientiousness, or because their reason does not permit them to believe in Him? No; Christ's sinlessness, His divine works, His precious Gospel is before them; they cannot gainsay it; it is attested by better evidence than a thousand historical facts which they believe. The truth is, they do not want to believe; they are puffed up with pride, arrogance, and conceitedness.

And why do so many not believe in the Bible? Why do they not accept this only divine guide of men? Is it because they know better? Is it because their wisdom excels that of the Word of God? No; the human mind furnishes answers totally inadequate to secure man's salvation. The wisest men of this world have occupied themselves with finding answers to the problems connected with the soul's welfare. Have they succeeded in finding true solutions? Far from it! When it comes to divine things, then we must say to our reason: Stop and hear what God has to say in His Word and accept the Word of God with a believing heart.

Prayer.

O merciful God, heavenly Father, who alone beginnest and performest in us every good thing, we pray Thee, strengthen us that we may be steadfast in the true faith and remain constant to the end. Keep us from false doctrine, fleshly lust, and the deceit of the world. Grant that we may continue to grow in the knowledge of Christ, Thy Son. Do not suffer us to be led from the truth of Thy divine Word and thus to deny Jesus and yield to unbelief. Amen.

Don't do as other people do,
Who Jesus have denied;
Nor go where you would be ashamed
To have Him at your side.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
He shall your paths direct.
But do not yield to unbelief,
If mercy you expect.

5. The Soul Longs for Some Great and Lasting Bliss.

What is a man profited if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul? *Matt. 16, 26.*

The soul said to the body, "We must surely part, and now let us reckon together." "Let us reckon, sister," said the body. "You," said the soul, "have been active in labor and toil, early and late, and have gathered much gold. Will you keep it with you, or shall I take it with me?" "Alas!" said the body, "how can I take it and carry it with me in the darkness and dust and corruption of death?

What will it profit me there?" "No," said the soul, "but how can I carry it where earth and earthly things are not permitted to enter? And, after all, it is but yellow earth." "And it will soon be neither mine nor thine," said the body sorrowfully. "Our reckoning is not over," said the soul. "How are we to meet again? Will it be in sorrow or in joy? You have never allowed me to look heavenward, but robbed me of my freedom and used all my powers to help you to get gold; but I have a longing for something greater, for an everlasting bliss, for eternal joy. Gold cannot satisfy me."

Yes, as the wanderer of the desert longeth for water to make him happy, so the soul of man longs for some great and lasting bliss. Where, then, is this bliss, this greatest of boons, to be found? Scripture tells us that *God* is the Fountain of Life that alone can satisfy the thirsty soul. But most men despise this gracious Fountain of living water. Yea, thousands of people, many so-called Christians also, if they had to choose between God and gold, would unhesitatingly choose the latter. But what are all those things that money can do or procure? Do they really make a person happy and content? Can they bring peace to the sinful heart of man? Can they give to the soul that perfect satisfaction which it craves for? No, money and all that it can procure will vanish in the end. It vanishes from man when he is leaving this world. And then what? Ah! the immortal soul longs for something more than gold; it longs for some great and lasting bliss. That man is still to be found whose soul has attained perfect happiness from earthly possessions. For what would a man profit though he were the richest heir on earth, but not an heir of the kingdom of God?

Prayer.

O Thou faithful God, my soul longeth for Thee and thirsteth for the Fountain of Life. I humbly beseech Thee in the name of Jesus Christ to turn to me in mercy all the days of my life, to pardon mine iniquity, to comfort me by Thy grace, to strengthen me by Thy power, to guide me by Thy Holy Spirit, that I may live according to Thy will. I commend my body and soul into Thy hands. Amen.

Break the gloom where souls are dying,
Lost in darkness, sin, and strife;
Speak the Word to mourners sighing,
Lead them on the way of life.

6. I Believe in God.

Fear not: I am thy Shield and thy exceeding great Reward.
Gen. 15, 1.

When a thinking man contemplates the universe, a voice within him says, "*God* made all." When he thinks of the beginning of all things, he imagines God as existing before the world began, and the voice within him says, "The *eternal* God made it." When he marvels at the magnitude of the world and its powerful forces, the voice says, "The *almighty* God made it." When he sees sun, moon, and stars circle around the earth, the perfect workmanship in this vast machinery, the marvelous works all about him, the wonderful adaptation of means to ends, the artistry manifested in nature, the masterly construction of all creation, the voice says, "The *wise* God made it all." And when man enjoys sunshine and rain from heaven, fruitful seasons and plentiful crops, he concludes that the invisible God is *good.* The works of creation speak an unmistakable language, a language which every intelligent man can understand, and he is constrained to admit that there is a God.

Here, however, man has reached the bounds of what, by nature, may be known of God. Unenlightened, natural man is able to see and understand that God created heaven and earth and all that is therein, and that the earth is full of His riches, and he also feels the duty of service to God; but his conception of this duty, as well as his performance of it, is far from being sufficient to make him acceptable with God. This natural knowledge of God is utterly inadequate to save him, and if he had no other knowledge of Him, he could do no more, after all, than build an altar to the "unknown God." How we can be saved, God has revealed in the Scriptures. From this Book of Life, and from it alone, we obtain a saving knowledge of God. From the Bible we learn that God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Prayer.

O Thou most high God, we thank Thee that Thou hast revealed Thyself not only by means of Thy wonderful works, but chiefly through Thy holy Word, from which we may know Thee and Thy Son Jesus Christ and thus have eternal life. We thank Thee that Thou hast brought us to the knowledge of the truth as it is revealed in Thy dear Son, our Lord and Savior. Keep us steadfast in the faith, that we may receive our souls' salvation and praise Thee for all Thy mercy throughout eternity. Amen.

For all that God in mercy sends,
For health and children, home and friends,
For comfort in the time of need,
For every kindly word and deed,
For happy thoughts and holy talk,
For guidance in our daily walk,—
For everything give thanks!

7. There Is Only One God.

Hear, O Israel: the Lord, our God, is one Lord. *Deut. 6, 4.*

Every one's own reason tells him that there is only *one* God. There is but one infinite, self-existing Spirit, who revealed Himself as the "I Am," from whom, through whom, and to whom are all things. There is none other God but one. There are not three gods; there are not many gods, but there is only "one God and Father of all." There is but one divine essence; and this one divine essence is called, and is, God. Nevertheless there are three distinct persons, and each one of these three persons is God. When you name one person, you name the entire Holy Trinity. The three persons dwell one in the other, as Christ says: "I am in the Father and the Father in Me." There is but one plan, one power, one administration, one sovereign authority. The thought of the three is actually one. To all belongs the same honor. Accordingly a Church Father has said: "I cannot attempt to think of One; as soon as I would do it, I am instantly surrounded with the splendor of Three; I cannot attempt to distribute the Three, but am instantly carried back to the idea of One."

There is only *one* God. Already Moses taught this fact to the children of Israel when he said: "The Lord, He is God in heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is none else." And in the Book of Isaiah the Lord says of Himself: "I am the First, and I am the Last; and beside Me there is no God."

The religion of heathen peoples is polytheism, that is, they believe in many gods. There is in their religion no conscious monotheism, no conception of a single Supreme Power, from whom man and nature and all the forces in nature have their origin. Yet God revealed Himself to the first parents of the human race, and later, too, as a single personal Being, so that all races of men had at the first this idea as an inheritance handed down to them.

Prayer.

O Thou incomprehensible God, Thou art three in persons, but only one in essence; for there is only one God, and not many. Alas! the foolish hearts of the Gentiles are darkened. Professing themselves to be wise, they become fools, changing Thy glory into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and beasts, and creeping things, and worshiping and serving the creature more than Thee, the Creator of all things, blessed forever. O Holy Trinity, for Thy revealed Word, for all Thy grace and benefits bestowed upon us, we render unto Thee praise, honor, and glory. Amen.

Be steadfast! Be wise!
Build on, my soul, till death
Shall bring you to your God;
He takes you at your parting breath
To your divine abode.

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8. There Are Three Persons in One Divine Essence.

The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all. *2 Cor. 13, 14.*

There are three distinct persons who are equally God in the one, undivided, and indivisible essence. One person is the Father, another person is the Son, and another person is the Holy Ghost. This is called the Holy Trinity. By the Holy Trinity is meant the union of three persons in one Godhead. Already in the first verse of the Bible we find a revelation of the Trinity. In the first chapter of the Old Testament, God speaks in the plural: "Let Us make man." When Sodom was destroyed, it is said: "Then *the Lord* rained upon Sodom and upon Gomorrah brimstone and fire *from the Lord* out of heaven." Three are mentioned in the Aaronic Blessing, three in the song Isaiah heard: "Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts." John, at the baptism of Christ, saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove, and he heard a voice from heaven saying: "This is My beloved Son." Christ said: "I will pray the Father, and He shall give you another Comforter." He also clearly and explicitly commands His disciples: "Baptize in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." The three persons are named in the Apostolic Benediction: "The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ and the love of God and the communion of the Holy Ghost be with you all"; likewise in 1 Cor. 12, 4—6: "There are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God, which worketh all in all." In the first chapter of the First Epistle of Peter we find mentioned "the foreknowledge of God the Father," the "sanctification of the Spirit," and the "obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ."

Though we cannot comprehend the mystery of the Holy Trinity, yet we believe it, because Scripture teaches it. Yes, we believe and confess: I believe in God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost.

Prayer.

O Thou most holy and ever-blessed Trinity, God the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, we thank and praise Thee that Thou hast revealed Thyself to us in Thy Word as the only true and living God from everlasting, Three in One, and One in Three, our Creator, Preserver, Redeemer, and Sanctifier. Glory and praise and worship be unto Thee, who hast given unto us grace to confess the eternal Trinity and in true faith to worship the Unity. We beseech Thee that Thou wouldst keep us steadfast in this faith, who livest and reignest forever. Amen.

To the great One in Three
The highest praises be,
Hence, evermore!
His sovereign majesty
May we in glory see
And to eternity
Love and adore.

9. How the Divine Persons are Distinguished from Each Other.

Because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father. *Gal. 4, 6.*

Some things are said of each person in the Godhead that cannot be said of the others. The three divine persons are differentiated in Scripture as three distinct persons by their personal properties. There is a difference between them, not a difference in their divine essence, but a *personal difference.* The Athanasian Creed says: "Another person is the Father, another the Son, another the Holy Ghost." The Father is made of none, neither created, nor begotten; but He has begotten the Son from eternity. The Son is of the Father alone, not made, nor created, but begotten of the Father from eternity. The Holy Ghost is neither made, nor created, nor begotten, but proceeding from the Father and the Son.

Ps. 2, 7 the Father says to the Savior of mankind: "Thou art My Son; this day have I begotten Thee." And the Lord Jesus says to His disciples, John 15, 26: "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of Truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me." Here we see the difference between the three divine persons.

And this is not an imaginary difference, but a real difference, marked by divers operations and works. We ascribe preeminently the work of creation to the Father, the work of redemption to the Son, and the work of sanctification to the Holy Ghost, though the three persons cooperated in all their works directed toward the world. Also the Son and the Holy Ghost took part in the work of creation; nor can the Father and the Holy Ghost be excluded from the work of redemption, though the Savior in the fullest meaning of the term is the Son of God, who became man and died on the cross to reconcile us with God. This can be said only of Him, not of the Father and not of the Holy Ghost. Again, the Bible speaks of the conversion of man and of the whole work of sanctification in a way which points chiefly to the Holy Ghost. It is preeminently His work.

Prayer.

O God, my Father, I entrust myself fully to Thy care, Thy grace, love, and truth. O Jesus, my Redeemer, I clothe myself with Thy merits, with Thy blood, Thy wounds and am happy in Thy blessed communion. O Holy Spirit, my Comforter, I commit myself wholly to Thy guidance, power, light, and comfort. O Triune God, Thou art mine, I am Thine; Thou art my Father, I am Thy child; Thou art my Shepherd, I am Thy sheep; Thou art my Lord, I am Thine own. Amen.

God Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Be Thou this day my Guide and Host.

My soul and body keep from harm,
O'er all I have extend Thine arm,
That Satan may not cause distress,
Nor bring me shame and wretchedness.

10. The Importance of the Doctrine of the Holy Trinity.

For of Him and through Him and to Him are all things; to whom be glory forever! *Rom. 11, 36.*

The doctrine of the Holy Trinity was considered so important by the early Christian Church as to make it the subject of a special festival. The true reason why this was done is stated by the Athanasian Creed in the following words: "Whosoever will be saved, before all things it is necessary that he hold the true Christian faith. Which faith except every one do keep whole and undefiled, without doubt he shall perish everlastingly. But this is the true Christian faith: that we worship one God only in Trinity, and Trinity in Unity, neither confounding the persons nor dividing the essence."

No man can be saved without faith in the Triune God. God is the blessed Fountain of Life, not only of the temporal, but also of the spiritual and eternal life. This Fountain is accessible to us only through God the Son. He is the Way to the Father. And on this way the Holy Ghost leads us to the ever-flowing Fountain of Life and makes us partakers of eternal life and happiness. Could we be saved without this faith?

We must therefore confess and defend the doctrine of the Holy Trinity as the chief article of our Christian faith. This doctrine is of vital importance. It distinguishes the Christian Church from all false religions. It is so inseparably connected with the chief doctrines of religion that to deny it is to reject the essence of Christianity and to place oneself outside the pale of the Christian Church. Such as deny one of the three persons of the Godhead are not Christians, even though they claim to believe in the Bible and class themselves with the Christians, as the Unitarians, the Universalists, the Spiritualists, the Christian Scientists, the Mormons, the Jews, and the lodges. They must be classed with the heathen because they deny the true God. Let us not be deceived by those who attempt to rob us of our faith in the Triune God.

Prayer.

O Triune God, we thank Thee that Thou hast left Thy realm of light to reveal Thyself to us as the one God in three persons. But since this deep mystery of the Holy Trinity far transcends all our thoughts and conceptions, we pray Thee grant us grace to take our reason captive to Thy obedience and do not suffer the foolishness of our reason to oppose Thy wisdom. And do Thou imprint on our hearts the importance of this saving knowledge, that Thou art Three in One, in order that we may cherish this truth as a precious treasure over against all error and in deepest humility revere Thee and gratefully cherish what Thou hast revealed in Thy Word. Amen.

Let God the Father be adored
And God the Son, the only Lord,
And God the Holy Spirit be
Adored throughout eternity.

11. Of Creation.

Thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power; for Thou hast created all things, and for Thy pleasure they are and were created. *Rev. 4, 11.*

We shall now contemplate the wonderful works of creation. What glories crown the earth all around us! We are enraptured by the beauty and awed by the vastness of the ever-shifting scenes in nature about us. We gaze up into the heavens and behold the splendor of the starry heights and admire the infinite wisdom and grandeur of the mechanism of this beautiful, wonderful world. We ask, Who made it? Whence is this world upon which we mortals dwell? Did it come into existence of itself? We Christians know better. We know that this world was created by an all-powerful and all-wise Creator. Scripture says: "In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth." Hence the world did not spring into existence by chance, but at the bidding and by the power of God.

When as yet there was no material existence, God brought this world into being. God spake, and it was done; He commanded, and it stood fast. The psalmist says: "Of old hast Thou laid the foundations of the earth, and the heavens are the work of Thy hands." Four thousand years after the creation of heaven and earth, St. Paul wrote to the Colossians: "By Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible." And we confess with Luther: "I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason, and all my senses."

We ask ourselves, What may have induced God to do this? Why did He create us? It is but the love of God, who first loved us, whose tender mercies are over all His works. If we but open our eyes, we can perceive the love of God everywhere. All nature around us proclaims the great truth: "God is Love." He says: "I have loved thee with an everlasting love." Jer. 31, 3.

Prayer.

O almighty God, heavenly Father, we praise Thee that of Thy goodness Thou didst make the earth and all creatures subservient to mankind. Great and marvelous are Thy works; who can utter Thy mighty acts? Who can show forth all Thy praise? Yet will we not be silent, but praise Thy holy name without ceasing. We will praise Thee in Thy sanctuary. Daily we will praise Thee in the firmament of Thy power, praise Thee for Thy mighty acts, praise Thee according to Thy excellent greatness. Let everything that hath breath praise the Lord. Amen.

Who made the sky so bright and blue?
Who made the fields so green?
Who made the flowers in pretty hue
That with delight are seen?
'Twas God who made this world so fair,
The sun, the sky, the air;
'Twas God who made the sea, the ground,
And all the things around.

12. Evolution Contradicts the Bible.

Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear. ***Heb. 11, 3.***

What is evolution? It is the false doctrine that the world came into existence by itself. Through millions upon millions of years the universe gradually evolved, and organic life came forth, and in the struggle for existence, through natural selection, *lower forms grew into higher forms* of plant and animal life and finally man was developed!

We ask, Where did the first simplest types come from? The evolutionists answer, They sprang into existence by themselves. We rejoin, Can a house build itself? Can a watch or anything else construct itself? Is there anything visible in this world of which it may truly be said that it has no maker? The answer must be in the negative. Now, if the things we daily see and come in contact with are made by some one, why should not those ancient simplest types have had some one to call them into being?

But we ask another question, Where did *living* matter come from? The evolutionists answer, Of the dead matter. We ask again, How can life come out of dead matter? Here some scientists feel that they are assuming too much, and therefore they admit that there was a Guiding Intelligence at work. Others speak of a cell that God imbued with life. Out of this cell, in millions of years, the earth and all things evolved. Instead of conceding that God created the world, they maintain that one world created another.

There is nothing more unreasonable than the "creed" of the unbelievers. To the one living God they refuse to give the honor due Him; instead they prostrate themselves, as it were, before their "atoms" and revel in the dust. Indeed, evolution is born of unbelief, has been handed down by the ancient heathen, and is diametrically opposed to the Scriptures. We read in the Epistle to the Hebrews: "For every house is built by some one; but *He that built all things is God.*"

Prayer.

O almighty, everlasting God, Creator of heaven and earth, grant that we may more and more know Thee and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent, and in all Thy works, which are great and manifold, praise Thy omnipotence, wisdom, goodness, righteousness, and truth. Preserve us from false doctrine and the tares strewn broadcast by the devil. Grant that the pure doctrine of Thy Word may be preached among all Christians; and do Thou so direct the course of our lives that in all we think or say or do we may glorify Thy holy name. Amen.

What God's almighty power hath made
His gracious mercy keepeth;
By morning low or evening shade
His watchful eye ne'er sleepeth;
Within the kingdom of His might,
Lo, all is just and all is right;
To God all praise and glory!

13. In Six Days the Lord Made Heaven and Earth.

In six days the Lord made heaven and earth, the sea, and all that in them is. *Ex. 20, 11.*

God said, "Let there be *light,*" and elemental light flamed out of the darkness. And God divided the light from the darkness, and there was day and night; and the evening and the morning were the first day.

And God said, "Let there be a *firmament* in the midst of the waters." And the waters under the firmament were divided from the waters above it. What mighty movements of waters on the earth and above the firmament, that is, the starry sky! And the evening and the morning were the second day.

And God said, "Let the waters under the heaven be gathered together unto one place, and let the *dry land* appear." And it was so. And God said, "Let the earth bring forth." And, behold, the young world teemed with beauty and abundance of *vegetation.* And the evening and the morning were the third day.

And God said, "Let there be *lights* in the firmament of the heaven." And it was so. Sun, moon, and stars stood forth to mark days and months and seasons and years by their courses and to give light upon the earth, thus serving man, the center of the universe. And the evening and the morning were the fourth day.

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth," and the waters brought forth denizens of the sea and sky, *fishes and fowl.* And the evening and the morning were the fifth day.

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth the living creature after his kind." And it was so. And God made *man* in His own image. And in all these and in all growing things was the power to reproduce their kind. And the evening and the morning were the sixth day.

In six days God created heaven and earth. These days are natural days, as our days are, for they are marked by evening and morning.

Prayer.

O Lord, let us not reject Thy holy Word. Preserve us from all those who seek the destruction of true doctrine for setting up and establishing their shameful idolatry. Let not Thy precious Word, the bright and unchanging light, which now shineth among us, be overpowered or put out, that we may in true faith call upon Thee, give thanks to Thee for all the wonderful works of Thy creation, and ever praise and honor Thee, through Jesus Christ, Thy beloved Son, our Lord. Amen.

The angel host, O king of kings,
Thy praise forever telling,
In earth and sky all living things
Beneath Thy shadow dwelling,
Adore and praise their Maker's might,
Whose wisdom orders all things right;
To God all praise and glory!

14. God Is Omnipotent.

With God nothing shall be impossible. *Luke 1, 37.*

God can do and does whatever He purposes to do. At His word the universe appeared. His word upholds all things. His breath bestows life. At His nod nations are destroyed. He directs the hurricane and the lightning. Sun, moon, and stars obey His commands. Millions of powerful angels fulfil His every wish. God is almighty. How could He be God if He did not possess all power, if He did not rule over all, but were inferior to some one? The idols invented by man are powerless. "But our God is in the heavens; He hath done whatsoever He hath pleased." What He designs He effects; what He promises He performs. Saying and doing are not two things with Him. He Himself said to Abraham: "I am the almighty God; walk before Me, and be thou perfect."

Therefore we Christians look up to God as the Giver of all temporal and spiritual goods; even our life and its maintenance is a boon which the hand of the Almighty has conferred upon us. And we rightly believe that no evil can befall us without His holy will or sufferance. God's power can prevent it. Nothing can oppose His majestic power. And when we are in great distress, we think of God's omnipotence. We call upon Him in the day of trouble and firmly believe that He can help us, yea, exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think. No situation is so serious as to baffle Him, no trouble so great as to find Him void of means to deliver us. Therefore we Christians do not despair in our sufferings and tribulations, but always rejoice in our Lord, the Almighty, and sing with Asaph in the 77th Psalm: "I cried unto God with my voice, even unto God with my voice; and He gave ear unto me. Who is so great a God as our God? Thou art the God that doest wonders." *And this almighty God is our Father in Christ Jesus and loves us* and has given us most precious promises.

Prayer.

O Thou omnipotent God, almighty and powerful in heaven and on earth, Thou art so mighty and powerful that Thou wouldst be able instantly to destroy the whole world with a single word of Thy mouth or with a single stroke of lightning, if Thou didst desire to deal with us according to stern justice. But we bend our knees and humbly beseech Thee to cease from Thy fierce wrath, which is kindled against our sins like a fire. Have compassion upon us, spare us, lift up Thy face upon us, and be gracious unto us for the sake of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Fear not, I am with thee; oh, be not dismayed!
For I am Thy God and will still give thee aid:
I'll strengthen thee, help thee, and cause thee to stand,
Upheld by My righteous, omnipotent hand.

15. The Good Angels.

By Him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible. *Col. 1, 16.*

The foremost among the invisible creatures are the good angels. Everywhere in Scripture they are described as rational beings of a high order. Yet they have not flesh and blood; they are spirits. In ages past they sometimes assumed bodily shapes and appeared to man; but their nature is complete without a body. Their number remains ever the same, for they do not marry, neither do they die. They are very numerous. Jesus could have asked His Father for a guard of more than twelve legions of angels. And the Prophet Daniel says: "Thousand thousands ministered unto Him, and ten thousand times ten thousand stood before Him."

Heaven is their blessed abode; as Jesus says: "In heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven." And again: "In the resurrection they [the saints in heaven] neither marry nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven." And from heaven they come down to the earth as messengers and ministers of God to carry out His commands and to serve mankind. Swiftly, as a ray of light flashes through space, they go from place to place.

God created these spirits with superior intelligence. Their knowledge far surpasses that of man. We read 2 Sam. 14, 20: "My lord is wise, according to the wisdom of an angel of God, to know all things that are in the earth." And they are very powerful spirits. An angel of the Lord in one night smote all the first-born in Egypt. An angel broke the power of Sennacherib by slaying 185,000 Assyrians in one night. The good angels are sent forth by their Creator on missions of various kinds, generally on missions of love and mercy, but sometimes on errands of wrath and judgment, especially upon those who persecute the Church.

The good angels praise and bless the Lord, their God. They also protect and guide the godly on their pilgrimage to heaven. "The angel of the Lord encampeth round about them that fear Him and delivereth them."

Prayer.

O everlasting God, who hast ordained the services of angels and men in a wonderful order, mercifully grant that, as Thy holy angels always do Thee service in heaven, so by Thy appointment they may succor and defend us on earth. We beseech Thee that Thou wouldst give these ministering spirits charge over us and over all who fear Thee, that the Evil Foe may not disquiet or harm us. Let Thy holy angels serve Thy faithful children on earth and protect them from the assaults of Satan and the wickedness of the world; and on the Last Day let them gather us from our graves into Thy heavenly kingdom and receive us into their blessed company, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Though destruction walk around us,
Though the arrows past us fly,
Angel guards from Thee surround us;
We are safe if Thou art nigh.

16. The Evil Angels.

Then shall He say also unto them on the left hand, Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels. *Matt. 25, 41.*

The evil angels were created as good angels. But they sinned against God and were cast out of heaven. So we are told 2 Pet. 2, 4: "God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down into hell and delivered them into chains of darkness to be reserved unto Judgment." These fallen angels are the original sinners. They abode not in the truth. Truthfulness was their nature as given them by God, and they could not be reclaimed. As rebels against their Maker and Lord they were outlawed from the celestial kingdom and forever rejected from His blissful presence. So we read Jude 6: "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the Great Day." They dare entertain no hope of redemption.

Now they form the kingdom of evil; theirs is the power of darkness. They are a united host, organized under the direction of Satan, the prince of the evil spirits. And what do they busy themselves with? They are the declared enemies of God and man and are intent upon destroying the works of God. Their evil intention at all times is to lead man into sin. They tempt also us Christians to hate, to lie, to slander; they tempt us to disobedience; they fill our hearts with impure thoughts. All their faculties are bent on evil. They are utterly wicked and unclean. They hate, and seek to destroy, all that is of God and labor to promote evil. They are cruel adversaries and have great wrath. They cannot but will what is evil and sinful.

They are enemies whom we dare not ignore. Let us not be deceived as to these enemies in the spiritual realm! These demons of hell, with spiritual wickedness in high places, are the greatest and the most dangerous enemies we Christians have. The apostle calls them "principalities and powers." So great is their power that no man can overcome them except in the name and by the power of Jesus Christ, who overcame Satan in our stead and for our benefit.

Prayer.

Eternal, almighty God and Father, I return unto Thee most heartfelt thanks for having this day and all the days of my life graciously kept me through Thy holy angels from all harm and danger of body and soul; and I pray Thee from my inmost heart, protect me against the assaults and wickedness of the evil spirits that they may neither harm nor disquiet me and that Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Amen.

Though devils all the world should fill,
All eager to devour us,
We tremble not, we fear no ill,
They shall not overpower us.

This world's prince may still
Scowl fierce as he will,
He can harm us none;
He's judged, the deed is done;
One little word can fell him.

17. Of Satan, the Prince of Evil Spirits.

Your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour. *1 Pet. 5, 8.*

The evil spirits are organized under the direction of Satan, the prince of the devils. He is very cunning. Remember how he brought about the fall of our first parents. He will not cease tempting us till he has found out where we are weakest. Therefore the Bible warns: "Be sober, be vigilant!" There is not an hour of the day in which we are not tempted by this formidable foe. He comes as an angel of light, quoting Scripture, but perverting it. Or he approaches like an adder, insidiously, fascinating men's minds by his bewitching manner, until all unawares the sin and wickedness to which he has tempted us is done. Again, he lies in wait like a wild beast and, when man is most secure, springs upon him and entraps him into sin. He suggests to Christians misbelief, error, and impure thoughts; he beguiles their senses with allurements of pleasure and the glory and riches of this world; he plies them with afflictions, pushing and browbeating them into sin. And when he has won them, he rules over them in his satanic kingdom.

The whole world is Satan's kingdom, for which reason he is called the prince of this world, the god of this world; for it is he who corrupted it. He seduced man to sin and thereby introduced sin into the world and, together with it, woe, misery, and death. All men are born sinners and therefore by nature subjects of Satan in his kingdom. Had not God had compassion on the fallen human race, not a soul would be saved, but all men would have to remain in Satan's kingdom and share with him his doom of eternal damnation. But God did have mercy on us. There is a victory over Satan.

Christ has broken the power of the devil, and He gives us the power to resist the devil. He has given us a weapon with which we can stand firm and slay the great enemy of our soul: His Word. And if we stand fast in the faith, the devil cannot harm us.

Prayer.

Almighty God and Father, grant me grace to guard myself against the temptations of Satan, against sin and shame, and to be found in accord with Thy divine will, in order that I may walk so that, guarded against all ill, I may always cherish Thee in my heart and thoughts. And when the hour of my death draws nigh and I am to depart this life, grant, I beseech Thee, that I may fall asleep in the true knowledge of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, and awake unto life eternal. Amen.

Fear not, O little flock, the foe
Who madly seeks your overthrow;
Dread not his rage and power.
What though your courage sometimes faints,
His seeming triumph o'er God's saints
Lasts but a little hour.

18. Of Man.

I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Marvelous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well.
Ps. 139, 14.

We believe that man is not the product of evolutionary development, but that he was created in the beginning an intelligent and moral being, consisting of body and soul. Man is the foremost among the visible creatures, because God Himself has prepared his body, given him a rational soul, and created him in His own image. The very manner in which God created man reflects His unspeakable love to him. Truly, man, God's noblest handiwork, was wonderfully made. His beautiful body, superbly symmetrical, stands erect, with face turned forward and upward. His wonderful body was not, as in the case of all other creatures, simply created by the word of the Almighty, but was formed of the chief elements of the earth.

And God breathed into this body the breath of life. The form of clay lived and breathed. Man hears the sounds and sees the wonders of nature round about him. Adam was able to give an appropriate name to every living creature, for he was gifted with speech and a keen and strong intellect. Man was intended to be the lord of the earth; for when all else was created, God took counsel with Himself, saying: "Let us make man in Our image, after Our likeness; and let them have dominion over . . . all the earth." Besides appointing him lord of the earth God gave him immortality, that he should live for God and with God forever.

Both his dominion over the earth and his immortality man lost by sin. He was created holy and innocent; but in his present fallen estate he is entirely depraved and enslaved in the service of sin. Sin, with its countless hosts of evils, death, and damnation, entered the world and fastened its fangs upon our first parents, poisoning the fountain of life and the stream of humanity. But it was not to remain so forever. For as soon as sin entered the world, also the Savior from sin was promised.

Prayer.

Eternal, almighty God, Thou didst create man in Thine own image to live evermore before Thee according to Thy holy will and in perfect blessedness. Alas! the image was lost, and our nature has become depraved by sin. Our understanding is darkened, our desires are impure, our will is at variance with Thy Law. And the wages of our sin is death. But we praise Thee, O Thou Father of mercies, that Thou didst send Thy Son, the image of Thyself, to win back for us the right to become again Thy children. Grant, then, that we may accept Him in true faith. Amen.

Be of good cheer; your cause belongs
To Him who can avenge your wrongs;
Leave it to His great power.
Though hidden yet from mortal eyes,
His Savior shall for you arise,
At His appointed hour.

19. The Image of God.

God created man in His own image, in the image of God created He him. *Gen. 1, 27.*

When God created man on the sixth day of creation, there was not a stain upon him; he was like unto God, holy, righteous, and as free from sin as the angels in heaven. The divine image consisted in blissful knowledge of God and in perfect righteousness and holiness. As God is holy, He had made also man holy. Man had a fervent desire for holiness. The apostle therefore writes, Eph. 4, 24: "Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness." Besides this, man also had a rich knowledge of God and a pure and strong affection to serve the Lord voluntarily and with joy. Our Confessions say: "The greatest excellency of this noble first creature was a bright light in his heart by virtue of which he had a perfect knowledge of God and His works, and true fear of God and truly sincere confidence in

Him dwelt in it, and in every respect he had a correct, reliable understanding and a heart well disposed toward God and all divine things."

Man had a blissful knowledge of God, reverent fear of God, ardent love of God, perfect trust in God. Therefore the apostle admonishes, Col. 3, 10: "Put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of Him that created him." Man knew the will of God and was both able and willing to do it; that was the image of God.

This image of God was lost to man in the Fall, and it would have been lost forever, had not God, in His mercy, sent His beloved Son into the world to live and die for us and thus to restore to us the lost divine image. A beginning of its renewal is made in the believers from the moment of their conversion, when by the gracious working of the Holy Ghost a new spiritual life is born in them. It must be our aim to renew this image by holy living all the days of our lives, until in the life to come it will be fully restored. Then we shall be entirely without sin, perfectly holy and righteous.

Prayer.

Almighty and everlasting God, who hast given us Thine only-begotten Son to take our nature upon Him, grant that we, being regenerate and made Thy children by adoption and grace, may daily be renewed by Thy Holy Spirit after the image of this same blessed and glorious Christ; who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost, ever one God, world without end. Amen.

Only draw away your heart
Now from pleasures base and hollow;
Would ye there with Christ have part,
Here His footsteps ye must follow;
Fix your heart beyond the skies,
Whither ye yourselves would rise.

20. God's Preservation of the World.

He upholds all things by the word of His power. *Heb. 1, 3.*

We believe that God preserves us and all creatures. We confess: "He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life." God created the world, and now He does not stand aloof. No, He fills heaven and earth; His almighty presence permeates all things, and He operates incessantly. Jesus says: "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work." God wills and causes the continuance of the created world. He sustains and preserves every part of it. In Acts 17 we read: "God is not far from every one of us; for in Him we live and move and have our being." Without Him we would have no existence at all. Without Him we could neither live nor move nor even breathe. Our pulse could not beat one minute without His upholding power.

And this is true not only of man, but of every living creature. God prepares and guards every blade of grass, every leaflet on the trees, and every grain in the fields. He sustains sun, moon, and stars on their daily circuit around the earth, and no less the little bird twittering in the trees and the tiny flower blooming unseen by the eyes of man. The greatest and the least have His equal care. Everywhere is the actively sustaining presence of the living God.

And especially upon man does God bestow loving care. Everything was made for man, and all creatures are subservient to man's welfare. In particular, however, God cares for His Church. It is for the sake of His Church that He sustains the earth and all there is in it. When God's elect have all been gathered, the world will cease. The prime purpose of the preservation of the world is the holy Christian Church, God's Kingdom of Grace.

God has ordained to provide for our sustenance by means of the labor of our hands. Despite our labor, however, it remains true that it is God who preserves us; for it is He who gives and sustains to us strength, health, skill, and ability, which enable us to obtain our daily bread.

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, who didst create all things and dost bless and preserve them, we thank Thee that Thou hast given us our body and soul and hast hitherto abundantly provided us with all we needed to support this body and life. And we beseech Thee, continue to shower upon us and all men all Thy wonted blessings for Thy praise and our welfare. Grant also that with firm faith and joyous confidence we may fully and at all times trust in Thee, who alone art able to preserve our life. Amen.

I cannot tell how the lilies
From their beds creep up so far;
I can only pluck them gently
And think how fair they are.

I do not know how the planets
Swing out into space so free,
But I know that One controls them,
And that is enough for me.

21. God Is Omnipresent.

Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world.
Matt. 28, 20.

In the Book of Jeremiah, in the 23d chapter, we read: "Am I a God at hand, saith the Lord, and not a God afar off? Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. Do I not fill heaven and earth? saith the Lord." God is everywhere, so that no one can hide from Him, and no one need search far for Him.

God the Father is omnipresent, and so is God the Holy Spirit; but also God the Son. He made this promise to His Christians: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Of Him St. Paul says: "He fills all things." He fills all things with His presence in heaven and in earth. He said: "All things that the Father hath are Mine."

The Triune God is inclosed nowhere, excluded from nowhere. He is a God at hand and a God afar off. He is above all and through all and in all. Therefore, wherever we are, when most lonesome and forsaken, God is near us; yea, He is with us always, hears our prayers, knows our cares. He is near us with His help and defense, as David sings in the 145th Psalm: "The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him; He also will hear their cry and will save them." And in the 23d Psalm he says: "Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; *for Thou art with me.*"

God's omnipresence is very consoling to us because through faith in Christ Jesus we are His children. We therefore do not flee from God and hide before our kind and loving God and heavenly Father, but praise and thank Him for His gracious omnipresence. We trust in the promise He gave to His children through the prophet Isaiah: "Fear not; for I have redeemed thee; thou art Mine. I will be with thee."

Prayer.

To Thee alone, O Lord, Thou omnipresent God, I entrust my body and soul and all I have. Do Thou guide my every footstep and my pilgrimage to my eternal home. Provide also faithfully for those dear to me. Grant them happiness and health. And when at last I shall have arrived at the goal of my pilgrimage, then give me a peaceful and happy death and take me into Thy glory, my heavenly home, where I shall dwell in Thy presence forevermore. Amen.

I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the Tempter's power?
Who like Thyself my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, O abide with me!

22. God's Providence.

Cast all your care upon Him; for He careth for you. *1 Pet. 5, 7.*

We believe that God richly and daily provides us with all that we need to support this body and life. To generation after generation of the earth's millions our bountiful Father has unlocked the larder of the earth, and has always richly provided for all of them. Day by day He grants us life and all the necessaries of life. Each one is obliged to say: "The eyes of all wait upon Thee, and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing."

What prompts God to do all this, to provide for us daily and richly? When we survey God's bounteous benefits, we cannot but acknowledge that we have received them purely out of fatherly, divine goodness and mercy. We cannot but confess that it is purely His unmerited love which induces Him to place all His creatures at our disposal, giving us dominion over the fish of the sea, the fowl of the air, and every living thing that moveth upon the earth, and commanding the sun to give us light, the clouds to give us rain, the earth to yield its products for us. His love induces Him to provide us with all the necessaries of life, with clothing and shoes, with meat and drink, and with everything that we need for the support and want of the body. It is the love of Him who first loved us, who gives daily bread even to the wicked, who is good to all, and whose tender mercies are over all His works.

When we see this, we feel that we must not live unto ourselves. We say with the psalmist: "What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me?" And not only with our lips should we praise our kind Father in heaven, but also by cheerfully living a godly life according to His pleasure. What a lesson of Christian duty! What a lesson, too, of trust for Christian believers! And what a lesson, in all this, of submission and dependence on God!

Prayer.

Almighty God, our heavenly Father, Thy mercies are new unto us every morning; and though we have in no wise deserved Thy goodness, Thou dost nevertheless abundantly provide for all our wants of body and soul. Grant us, we pray Thee, Thy Holy Spirit, that we may heartily acknowledge Thy merciful goodness toward us, give thanks for all Thy benefits, and serve Thee in willing obedience; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

God moves in ways so wide and free
His wonders to perform:
He plants His footsteps in the sea
And rides upon the storm.

Judge not the Lord by feeble sense,
But trust Him for His grace;
Behind a frowning Providence
He hides a smiling face.

23. God's Government of the World.

A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps. *Prov. 16, 9.*

The world is not ruled by chance or blind circumstance, but the Lord Omnipotent reigneth. And He governs the world according to a wise and good plan. His wisdom and justice and love in the government of the world should be our comfort. Of God's government of the world the psalm says: "The Lord looketh from heaven; He beholdeth all the sons of men. From the place of His habitation He looketh upon all the inhabitants of the earth. He fashions their hearts alike; He considereth all their works." God is not unconcerned about the affairs on earth. Of all the millions of people not one escapes His all-seeing eye; nor is He an idle spectator, allowing man to do as he pleases, but He fashions the hearts of all, and all things and all the affairs of men are in His hands, subject to His control and direction.

And His government extends even to the smallest and most trifling matters. He cares for the sparrows; one of them shall not fall to the ground without His permission. To the sparrows He stands but in the relation of the Creator to the creature; to us, however, He stands in the relation of a father to his children. If the Creator cares for the minutest of His creatures, will He not care for us, His children, whom He has bought with a price?

True, there are in this world wills other than God's. The will of the devil, the world, and our flesh are powerful wills for evil. But the Lord reigns supreme. He defends us against all danger and guards and protects us from all evil. His kingdom rules over all. The storm and the sea obey Him. All creatures obey His mandates. His government is everywhere. Earth and sun and moon and stars do His pleasure. The Omnipotent reigneth. He governs the world. We may confidently say: "I will fear no evil, for Thou art with me."

Prayer.

O almighty and everlasting God, vouchsafe, we beseech Thee, to direct, sanctify, and govern both our hearts and bodies in the ways of Thy laws and in the works of Thy commandments, that through Thy most mighty protection we may be preserved in body and soul. Watch over us with Thy power, save us from all calamity, and grant us grace to pass all the days of our lives blameless, holy, peaceful, and free from offense; for with Thee is mercy and plenteous redemption. Amen.

I know that the flowers must wither
And the stars be dimmed some day;
The song will sink into silence
And all things pass away.
But I also know of a Savior,
Whose face I shall sometime see.
He rules with a love eternal,
And that is enough for me.

24. God Turns Evil unto Good for His Children.

Ye thought evil against me, but God meant it unto good.
Gen. 50, 20.

Sin and wickedness are subject to God's government. God suffers the iniquity of men to reach only a certain limit; and He overrules it to the accomplishment of His designs. Joseph was sold by His brothers to slave-dealers, who carried him to Egypt, and there, in the course of time, he became a mighty lord and the means of saving many alive. God's divine guidance and direction turn evil unto good. What God did to Joseph He does also to you if you are a child of God. It is written in the Bible in order that you should be convinced of this consoling fact. "For whatever things were written aforetime were written for our learning that we through patience and comfort of the Scripture might have hope."

Also in your life God turns evil unto good. Believe this firmly. "All things work together for good to them that love God." This does not mean that God will make you a great lord on earth, as was the case with Joseph. But it does mean that God will make you to be something much greater than that. Here beneath you shall be His loving child, and at the end of your earthly pilgrimage He will receive you into His Kingdom of Glory, where fulness of joy and pleasures forevermore will fill your heart with bliss eternal. To that end all evil that befalls you must end as it did in the case of Joseph. God turns our sufferings into blessings.

What a comfort for every Christian! God's ways always lead to triumph, though we often cannot understand them. The Lord safely and securely directs the ship of His holy Christian Church, the communion of saints, through the stormy ocean of this world into the haven of eternal rest. He says, Is. 54, 7: "For a small moment have I forsaken thee; but with great mercies will I gather thee." Let each, then, say to Him: "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel."

Prayer.

O God, almighty and powerful in heaven and on earth, preserve our body and life, house and home, city and country, our property and all our belongings, also the fruits of the field, from hail, lightning, devastating floods, and all harm. Keep us also from a sudden evil death and graciously grant that the hearts of many sinners may be turned to Thee in true repentance and faith. Let us at all hours and moments be mindful of Thy glorious coming to Judgment and be prepared to receive Thee with joy and to enter eternal bliss with Thee. Amen.

Wholly to Thy blest protection
I commit my heart and mind.
Mighty God, to Thy direction
Wholly may I be resigned.
Lord, my Shield, my Light divine,
Oh, accept and own me Thine!

25. Purely out of Fatherly, Divine Goodness and Mercy.

Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. ***Ps. 103, 13.***

God manifested His love in the creation of the world. Many are the blessings which He showered upon us according to the First Article of our holy Christian Creed. God has made us and all creatures. He has given us a rational soul and made us the foremost of all visible creatures. For us He created heaven and earth and all that is therein. The whole world was made for man. Sun, moon, and stars give light to our earth, which is the center of the universe. The life of all creatures is in reality only subservient to our welfare. Even the angels in heaven are our servants. God sustains the earth and all that is therein; but He mainly provides for man, who is a sinner and therefore does not deserve any love or kindness on the part of his Creator, and — oh, fatherly, divine goodness and mercy! — defends us against all danger and guards and protects us from all evil. He has made us His dear children in Christ Jesus and opens for us the way to eternal life for our Savior's sake, who has redeemed us with His precious blood. The holy and almighty God stoops down to us poor sinners and becomes our good and merciful Father.

What may have induced God to do all this? Does He derive any benefit from us? Could He not dwell in glory and in perfect happiness without us? What impelled Him to call us into existence and to overwhelm us with His tender mercies? Any merit or worthiness in us? No; God owes us nothing. All His blessings He showers upon us purely out of His fatherly, divine goodness and mercy, and we must confess with Jacob that we are not worthy of the least of all the mercies with which He has blessed us so abundantly. This is the sentiment of every true Christian. Hence he sings his Maker's praise. "O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; because His mercy endureth forever."

Prayer.

O Lord, how great is Thy goodness towards us, who are not worthy of even the least of Thy manifold blessings! And how wonderfully infinite Thine omnipotence is in greatly multiplying the seed that decays in the soil! O Lord, Thou God of riches, all that men harvest is indeed Thine, for we cannot of ourselves cause anything to spring forth out of the earth; so if we get much or little, it is nevertheless more than we deserve. Thanks, therefore, be to Thy holy name for each and every thing that Thou hast given us! Thou alone art the God that didst sustain us from early infancy and dost bestow on us all manner of blessings. To Thee alone be all praise and honor. Amen.

All glory be to God on high,
Who hath our race befriended!
To us no harm shall now come nigh,
The strife at last is ended;
God showeth His good will to men,
And peace shall reign on earth again;
O thank Him for His goodness!

26. God Is Benevolent, Merciful, and Gracious.

The Lord is good to all, and His tender mercies are over all His works. *Ps. 145, 9.*

Wherever the attributes of God are revealed, we see rays of an indescribable glory and greatness. How excellent is our God! He is the great God, to whom every knee shall bow, whose will should be done on earth as it is in heaven; whom we should fear and love and in whom we should trust above all things, praising His name forevermore. It is but meet and proper that we do so; for He is eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent, holy, and just! What great comfort we may draw from these attributes of God! And why? Because this same God is a benevolent, merciful, and gracious God.

God is benevolent, inasmuch as He is desirous of blessing us. God is merciful, inasmuch as He has compassion on us and bestows His benefits upon us. God is gracious, inasmuch as He blesses us regardless of our merits or demerits. Oh, what a consolation for us poor sinners! From these attributes of God we learn how God is disposed toward us. "The Lord, the Lord God, merciful and gracious, long-suffering, and abundant in goodness and truth, keeping mercy for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin." This is how God is disposed toward us. In a word, "God is Love," as we read 1 John 4, 16.

God's whole essence is Love. The greatest manifestation of God's love was made when He sent His only-begotten Son to redeem us. If we would look into God's very heart and see how much He loves us, we must behold His dear Son Jesus Christ.

God commends His love toward us in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

How great must be the love Christ bears us to bring such a sacrifice for us; and how great must be the love of God the Father to us, not to spare His own Son that He might redeem us and make us His dear children! Oh, let us not receive this infinite divine love in vain! Let us love Him who has loved us first! And let us love Him in our neighbor!

Prayer.

O benevolent and merciful God, gracious Father in heaven, Thou hast again by the protection of Thy ministering spirits, the holy angels, kept me, so that I have lived to see this day in good health and spirits. For this I earnestly laud, praise, and magnify Thee. Furthermore I pray Thee, dear heavenly Father, whose will I desire to be done in all things, graciously remember me also in future. Help me, too, by Thy grace, to begin a new life well-pleasing to Thee, in fervent love to Thee and my neighbor. Amen.

Savior! Thy dying love Thou gavest me,
Nor should I aught withhold, dear Lord, from Thee;
In love my soul would bow,
My heart fulfil its vow,
Some offering bring Thee now,
Something for Thee.

27. What It Is to Believe in God.

We have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of Him. *Eph. 3, 12.*

By saying, "I believe in God," we declare: What is set forth in the three articles of the Creed I *know* to be the revealed truth of God's holy Word, I *accept* it as such with sincere conviction, and with firm confidence I *trust* in it in life and death. First of all, true faith must turn to the revealed Word of God. For "how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?" "So, then, faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God." Rom. 10, 17. So, if you would have the true faith, you must, in the first place, have a knowledge of that which God teaches us in the Bible.

In the second place, you must accept as true what the Scriptures say of God. You must *give assent* to everything you learn from the Bible. Of this the Lord Jesus says to the Jews: "Had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me."

In order to accept the Word of Christ as true, it is necessary diligently to read and hear the Word of Christ. For if you do this, you will so love the Lord Jesus and His Word that it will be impossible for you to think that He is an impostor. You will rather firmly believe every word of Holy Writ.

Mainly, however, faith is *firm confidence of the heart.* "Now, faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen." To believe in God means to trust in Him with a firm confidence. When we are told in the Bible that God is our true Father through Jesus Christ, and that we are His dear children, and if, then, trusting in this Word, we confidently come to God and cry, "Abba, Father," — then we believe in God as we should. Then we have boldness and access with confidence. And when we hear the promise of God to give us eternal life and are so firmly convinced of this eternal life that it becomes our daily joy and comfort, then we believe in God as we should, with an unwavering trust.

Prayer.

Almighty and merciful God, we heartily pray Thee that it may please Thee to strengthen our faith in us that we may be able to say with the apostle in unwavering trust and confidence: "I know whom I have believed and am persuaded." Grant us such faith through the power of the Holy Spirit so that we may have a firm conviction, walk in obedience to Thee, and receive the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls, for the sake of Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, our Lord. Amen.

Leave God to order all thy ways
And hope in Him, whate'er betide;
Thou'lt find Him in the evil days
Thine all-sufficient Strength and Guide.
Who trusts in God's unchanging love
Builds on a rock that naught can move.

28. Unbelief, the Most Heinous Sin.

He that believeth not shall be damned. *Mark 16, 16.*

We were the captives of Satan, held in bondage under the Law, and subject to eternal death. But God had compassion on us and purchased us from bondage and death unto liberty and life, from sorrow and sighing to everlasting joy and gladness. "Ye are bought with a price," St. Paul writes to the Corinthians. And what is the price, the ransom, that was paid for us? "God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." The price for our liberty was high; it cost God His only Son. And the Son did not refuse to be delivered into inexpressible pain and death. He consented to the will of the Father and gave Himself a ransom for us. And the blood of Jesus, our Redeemer, cleanses us from all sins. Purchased by the blood of the Son of God, we are purchased indeed. Now we belong to God and no longer to Satan.

Men are now no longer lost because they were not redeemed, because liberty had not been purchased for them, or because the chains of their bondage were so strong that they could not be freed from them; men are lost only because they slight the salvation of Christ, because they deny Him who bought them, — because they do not believe in Christ. Not believing in Christ is the greatest of sins, the only sin that damns. Alas, that the great multitude of men, notwithstanding they have been bought so dearly, should prefer to remain in bondage and bring upon themselves swift destruction! In the mean time the voice of the Gospel resounds throughout the world, inviting men out of bondage into liberty, out of darkness into light, and calling upon all men at all places to rejoice over the free salvation of God in Christ Jesus. But the unbeliever rejects this blessed invitation of the Gospel. He means to be more than the Most High; God's message seems despicable in his eyes!

Oh, what a terrible sinner the unbeliever is! He has not yet begun to understand the bottomless depth of his depravity. Surely unbelief is the most heinous sin.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus, Thou Brightness of God's glory, dispel all darkness of unbelief and ignorance and malice from my mind and let me believe aright, live holy, and die happy. When the end of my life draws nigh, O blessed Redeemer, hold me safe in Thine arms of love and grace that Satan may not snatch me out of them. Grant unto me a joyful departure and bestow this grace upon Thy servant, that I may in peace leave earth and enter heaven, and with all the elect behold Thee face to face, in everlasting joy. Amen.

Don't do as unbelievers do,
Who walk the downward way.
Temptations are on every side
To lead your feet astray,
And Satan walks throughout the land
God's children to deceive
With just as smooth, enticing words
As when he tempted Eve.

29. Our Religion, or the Christian Faith.

In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. *Eph. 1, 7.*

There are many false religions. One is that of the heathen, who pray to their idols; another is that of the Jews, who reject Jesus as their Savior; still another is that of the monks and hypocrites. All these are false religions because they seek forgiveness of sins by works of their own righteousness, rejecting the meritorious work of Christ, the only Mediator between God and man. This was the religion of the Pharisees, "which trusted in themselves that they were righteous and despised others." This religion is false: "For every one that exalteth himself shall be abased."

The only true religion is that of the publican, who said, "God be merciful to me, a sinner." This religion, the Christian religion, teaches that we receive forgiveness of sins and are justified before God, not by our works, but by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith.

Christ has procured forgiveness of sins for all men. This forgiveness is offered in the Gospel to all mankind. All men should therefore hear the Gospel. And all those who accept the forgiveness offered in the Gospel actually become partakers of such forgiveness and are truly Christians. Who, then, is a Christian?

A Christian is he who sincerely believes in the Savior of mankind, Jesus Christ, who bled and died on the cross for his sins. Faith, laying hold of the grace of God, grasps Jesus and His merit. The forgiveness gained by Christ and offered in the Gospel is accepted and appropriated by faith. While darkness covers all false religions, in the Christian religion, in Holy Scripture, is risen the glorious light of the Gospel: "By grace are ye saved, through faith." Eph. 2, 8. We are justified by faith because the only way to appropriate the promise of the Gospel is to lay hold of it. Considering this, are you, then, a Christian? Do you sincerely believe in the Savior? Can you say with St. Paul: "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me"? Is your life a life in the faith of the Son of God?

Prayer.

We pray Thee, Lord, our Redeemer, to enter the house of our heart, to enlighten us by the Holy Ghost, to cleanse our hearts and to grant us grace to walk worthy of the Gospel and to continue to the end of our days in the truth once known and confessed. O Lord

Jesus, let our souls obtain Thy salvation, so that, being saved through Thee, we may forever behold Thee in Thy kingdom and Thy great glory. Amen.

Ye who confess Christ's holy name,
To God give praise and glory!
Ye who the Father's power proclaim,
To God give praise and glory!
All idols under foot be trod,
The Lord is God! The Lord is God!
To God all praise and glory!

30. The Christian Faith was Darkened before the Reformation.

For, behold, the darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness the people. *Is. 60, 2.*

Dark, indeed, were the Middle Ages. People were taught that the Pope was a divinely appointed and infallible interpreter of Holy Scripture and that the Bible in the language and hands of the people was dangerous. Then, in place of the Word of God, the Pope at Rome set up his own word and authority as the only true light and demanded unconditional obedience of every soul in Christendom under pain of excommunication, even death. The people were kept in darkness. In this darkness many evils crept into the Christian Church and corrupted it. In this darkness the people could be led to believe many strange and unscriptural doctrines and traditions. Not having the light of the Bible, seekers for the truth searched in vain for salvation and peace for their troubled souls.

Ignorance and corruption held sway, and there was scarcely anything left of the Christian faith but the name. What at one time had been Christianity became little more than baptized heathenism. Masses, penances, and confessionals took the place of Christ and His righteousness. Darkness of night had set in. Superstition and vice raised their uncouth forms. The great apostasy, foretold by St. Paul, came, and the man of sin and the child of perdition, the abomination of desolation, foretold by Daniel, Christ, and the apostles, materialized in the Papacy of Rome. And the Pope's servants, the bishops and priests, were like their master.

Many sighed for the light and liberty of the Gospel. Earnest men of God worked and prayed and laid down their lives as martyrs for the truth — all apparently in vain, as the power of darkness crushed them. But when the Church seemed utterly undone, when attempted reformations by church councils and others had failed, God heard the prayer of the oppressed and made Mount Zion rejoice.

Prayer.

O merciful God and Father in heaven, look down from heaven upon the distress of so many people. Let the light of the Gospel rise unto those who as yet are far from Christ, the Fountain of salvation, and are still groping in the dense darkness of idolatry. Give unto us shepherds who do not rule harshly and severely over the sheep nor devour their substance, but who minister unto the weak in the spirit of love and gentleness, who comfort the sick, bring back the erring, seek the lost, and whose lives are as living examples for the flock. Amen.

The glorious light was lost from sight
When Pope and priests came riding
The souls for pelf and praise of self,
In God's truth not abiding,
But led the flock to fields of rock,
To works and worship hollow,
While sin and shame, in virtue's name,
In darkness' wake did follow.

31. With the Reformation a New Era Dawned.

Thus saith the Lord, In an acceptable time have I heard thee, and in a day of salvation have I helped thee. *Is. 49, 8.*

On the 31st of October, 1517, Dr. Martin Luther nailed the memorable Ninety-five Theses to the door of the Castle Church at Wittenberg. This proved to be the cause of that mighty upheaval which has brought us freedom from the bonds of Popery. The strokes of the hammer nailing those theses were soon heard in the most remote parts of the earth, like the roaring of heaven's thunderings, covering the whole world with its mighty force. By his gigantic work, Luther brought about the great change for which the children of God had been wishing and praying for many centuries.

When, at Worms, Luther made his clear and strong defense of the Gospel faith he had preached and closed it with the memorable words: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise; God help me! Amen," there was the strength of victory in that mighty "Amen," because it appealed to Scripture, the Word of Truth; it appealed to the Gospel, which is "the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

Now men, women, youths, fearlessly gave the lie to the priests whom they had dreaded so much before. Rome was startled; she wanted to use her old force. She wished to suppress the new teaching, which was nothing but the old truth brought to light again. Of no avail! The Lord had smitten Antichrist with the breath of His mouth. The world was once more enjoying the pure and abundant Gospel-preaching. The Church entered upon another epoch. With the Reformation a new era dawned for the world, an era of spiritual and temporal advancement. Who can enumerate the blessings which came upon the whole world in consequence of the Reformation? Advanced ideas of human rights, our free institutions, our political and religious liberty, — these, in addition to the pure Gospel, which is the greatest blessing, are all fruits of the Reformation.

Prayer.

We thank Thee, O Lord, that Thou hast deigned us worthy of being children of the Reformation. Let us show our gratitude by using to the fullest extent the blessings and privileges which are ours, lest by ingratitude we forfeit these gifts of Thy grace, as did Germany and other countries. Let us ever be mindful of the great honor which Thou hast bestowed upon us in making us Thy chosen generation and a royal priesthood. Let us never forget or shirk our solemn duty. Fill us with zeal and love for Thy work. Establish the work of our hands. Amen.

We believe the Reformation
Was the work of God;
Jesus, for our consolation,
By His shepherd's rod,
Led the people from papistic error's night
To the Gospel truth, its freedom, and its light.

32. Luther and the Bible.

To the Law and to the Testimony! If they speak not according to this Word, there is no light in them. *Is. 8, 20.*

Luther's greatest work, undoubtedly, was that he opened the long-closed Bible. One day the twenty-year-old student at the university at Erfurt was searching the library shelves for new books, when he came upon an old Latin volume hidden away in a dark corner. He eagerly read the title-page, "The Holy Bible." He had never seen the book before. He was surprised at its voluminous size. Was it an accident that Luther found that Book? No, it was God, who led him to the greatest discovery since the days of the apostles.

It was through this Bible that rays of divine light shone into Luther's agonized soul. It was from the Bible that he learned the one and only way of salvation — through faith in the crucified Savior. It was the Bible that Luther quoted in all his controversies to show that he was spreading God's truth among men. In his own heart he had experienced the divine power of the Bible. After he had learned to understand the words, "The just shall live by faith," Rom. 1, 17, he found that peace of heart and mind which he had sought so long in vain. He was so fully convinced of the truth of Scripture that he was ready to rest his case upon the verdict of the Bible. He was willing to retract everything he had written and be the first to burn his books if it could be proved by Holy Writ that what he had written was wrong.

And because Luther was convinced that the Bible is the divine truth, he translated it into the language of the common people. If Luther had done nothing more than to make the Bible known and to bring that book into the hands of the people, that alone would make him the greatest benefactor of his age and of all subsequent ages; for the Bible is the only source from which we derive true religious information. Luther told those who would not abide by Scripture that they had a different spirit from his. And the stamp of the true followers of Luther has always been their abiding by Scripture, believing what the Bible teaches.

Prayer.

We thank Thee, Lord God, heavenly Father, with all our hearts for Thy saving Gospel, which Thou hast given us that we may see in it Thy fatherly heart. We beseech Thee for the sake of Thy boundless mercy graciously to preserve unto us this blessed light of Thy Word and so to lead and guide our hearts by Thy Holy Spirit that we may nevermore depart from it, but firmly cling to it and at last be saved by it; through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, our Lord. Amen.

So Luther on his knees
Thanked God from depth of heart
And prayed Him that He might
To all this gift impart,
To have, and call their own,
The Bible pure and whole.
For in it there abounds
Full comfort for the soul.

33. The Lutheran Church.

Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. *Matt. 28, 20.*

What does the Lutheran Church stand for? What does it believe? The Lutheran Church believes that through Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, our Lord, who has redeemed, purchased, and won us lost and condemned creatures from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, we have grace with the great God, our Maker and our Judge; that we have forgiveness of all our sins; that we are declared free, or justified, from the curse, or condemnation, of God's holy Law; that we are God's dear children, for whom He cares and for whom He provides with true fatherly love and kindness, and who in the hour of death will not suffer us to perish, but will save our souls alive. Aye, every true Lutheran believes that.

And this faith of the Lutheran Church is sure and rests on a firm foundation. For it is not built on the changeful feelings of our hearts; not on any merit or virtue within us; not on any good works which we might do, but solely on the immutable rock of God's Word.

From this every one can see that we Lutherans are not a new sect. No, we have not cut loose from the one true holy Christian Church. Luther, by his doctrine, did not separate himself from the Christian Church, but he reformed the Church. Luther merely cleansed the Church from the errors and abominations that had crept into it. He drew forth the pure Word of God from under the rubbish which for centuries the Papacy had been accumulating upon it. It is, therefore, an undeniable fact that in the Lutheran Church we have returned to the doctrine and practise taught by Christ and His apostles. The true Apostolic Church has endured to this day and as a visible organization will be found in the Evangelical Lutheran Church, as long as this Church, by the grace of God, will adhere in every point to the doctrine of Christ and His apostles.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, who didst purge out the leaven of papistic error and idolatry, we pray Thee with a humble heart to preserve unto us also in the future Thy divine Word and the holy Sacraments. Protect and keep us and Thy whole Christian Church — particularly the Evangelical Lutheran Church — from all error and unbelief, from all soul-destroying doctrine. Restrain all enemies, persecutors, and blasphemers, and be Thou our Stay and Refuge, our Strength, our Shelter and Shield, that the gates of hell may not prevail against us. Amen.

My Church, my Church, my dear old Church!
I love her ancient name,
And God forbid a child of hers
Should ever do her shame!
Her mother-care I'll ever share,
Her child I am alone,
Till He who gave me to her arms
Shall call me to His own.

34. The Public Confessions Are the Standard of Doctrine in the Lutheran Church.

Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. *Matt. 10, 32.*

The works of Luther, the Reformer, and his colaborers, with a few exceptions, are throughout sound in doctrine, and hence we read them with the conviction that what is contained in their books is God's truth. But even the writings of the Reformer we do in no wise place on a level with the public Confessions of the Church. These, too, we subject to the general rule that the writings of individual theologians are to be tried by the Confessions of our Church. If in Luther's own writings anything is found not in agreement with the Confessions, we will not receive it as Lutheran doctrine; and this we do according to the clear declarations found in the *Book of Concord,* which says: "But whatever we have said hitherto concerning a compend, or outline, of sound doctrine must be referred simply to the sentence that we need a definite form of doctrine approved by universal consent, which all our Evangelical churches at once may recognize and adopt, and by which, as having itself been taken from the Word of God, all other writings may be tried or proved, which are set forth for our approbation and adoption." The public Confessions are the standard of doctrine in the Lutheran Church, and a man teaches Lutheran doctrine only in as far as his teachings are in agreement with these public writings, which the Lutheran Church has approved and adopted as expressing her faith.

We would therefore never consent to be bound even to the writings of the Reformer himself, much less to the writings of the later Lutheran theologians, because it is well known that in some things these later teachers of our Church, or dogmaticians, are not fully trustworthy guides. When we want to know what is Lutheran doctrine, we go to the *Book of Concord,* which contains all Confessions of the Lutheran Church. And from these Confessions there must be no appeal, neither to synods nor universities, much less to individual theologians, — only to the Scriptures.

Prayer.

We pray Thee, heavenly Father, grant us grace to hold fast our profession without wavering. There are mighty enemies who would wrest our hope and comfort out of our hands and thus tempt us to waver. Do not let us be misled into denying, or withholding from others, our Christian hope, our true religion. Stablish and strengthen us to withstand apostasy, to contend for the faith, to hold fast our profession unceasingly, privately and publicly, in good and evil days. Govern and guide us with Thy Holy Spirit, to the end that we may have, and unto our end keep, true faith and a good conscience. Amen.

Rejoice, rejoice, with heart and voice,
As Luther did, in Jesus;
And praise the light of faith so bright
By which the Savior frees us
From Pope's decree and masses' fee,
From sin and its damnation,
And leads us on, where He hath gone —
To glorious consolation.

35. Our Small Catechism.

As new-born babes, desire the sincere milk of the Word that ye may grow thereby. *1 Pet. 2, 2.*

God's Word is the only guide and norm, — this is the standpoint of the Lutheran Church. Why, then, the creeds and various confessional writings of the *Book of Concord* of 1580? Because the truth of the apostles' doctrine is in these writings emphasized against particular errors which, in the course of years, arose and therefore had to be refuted. These errors are widely taught to the present time. The Bible we accept because it is God's Word; the confessional writings, because they are in harmony with God's

Word. Our confessional teachings, embodied in the *Book of Concord,* discarded all human doctrines and emphatically point to the Scriptures. Also in Luther's Catechism we have naught but a joyful response to the Bible.

From Luther's Catechism we instruct our children in the rudiments of our Christian religion. The Bible teaches us the way of salvation in such a simple form that a child can understand it; and it speaks of mysteries which the wisest cannot search out. The former is milk, the latter is meat. To desire the sincere milk of the Word is to desire to learn and love to hear over and over again those simple truths which our Catechism has taken from the Word of God and which, therefore, can make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

The Small Catechism has fitly been styled the "Child's Bible," because from it many millions of children have been taught the way to everlasting life. When Luther published this booklet in 1529, he gave to the world a model religious text-book. Men never can outgrow the Catechism nor the need of hearing sermons on the Catechism. It is deservedly held in high esteem. In simple and condensed form it states the chief parts of the Christian doctrine. The very order and arrangement are admirable. Many men of rank have found the Catechism the most excellent book ever written and vie with one another in bestowing upon it words of highest praise.

Prayer.

O gracious God and Father, awaken in me a heartfelt desire for the sincere milk of the Word. Grant that my greatest pleasure and delight may ever be to read, and search, and grow in the knowledge of, Thy Word. May nothing be dearer to me in this world than Thy Word; may I love it more than gold and much fine gold, ever considering it my best treasure. Guard and keep me from error and false doctrine. Preserve me in Thy truth — Thy Word is truth. Let me remain steadfast in it to my last hour. Amen.

God's Word alone was made the stone
On which the Church is founded;
And grace alone, by faith alone,
The rock on which is grounded
The Christian's trust, on which he must
Be built by faithful preaching
On God's pure Word in clear accord
With the apostles' teaching.

36. The Augsburg Confession.

Be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you. *1 Pet. 3, 15.*

In the sixteenth century God granted the full light of the Gospel-truth to the nations of Northern Europe, and this truth our fathers laid down in a compendious book, the public Confessions of our Church. The foremost among these is the Augsburg Confession, which was read before Emperor Charles V during the Diet at Augsburg in 1530. This famous document, known the world over as the Augsburg Confession, contains twenty-eight articles.

It seemed as though this Protestant confession would never be submitted to the Diet. When the Protestant princes announced that their confession was ready to be read, His Majesty declined to hear it, saying that too many other matters were pending. The Saxon Elector John now fairly pleaded with the Emperor to grant their request, *viz.*, to grant a hearing to their important cause, as it concerned the eternal salvation of their souls. Hereupon the Emperor consented, and the Confession was read on Saturday afternoon, June 25, at three o'clock, amid profound silence and rapt attention.

The reading of the Confession, which made a deep and favorable impression upon the Catholic princes, consumed almost two hours, and then the Diet knew what the maligned Lutherans truly believed, taught, confessed, and practised in their churches. It was a powerful refutation of the many calumnies spread abroad against the Lutherans. Many Catholic nobles now showed a conciliating spirit. They felt that it was nothing but the truth, and they could not deny it. They saw that the Lutherans are sitting *in* the Bible and the papists aside of it. This confession of faith served the loyal Protestant Church as a banner borne aloft, beneath which her faithful members could rally. To this day it is a solid foundation whereon to build and a wall of defense against the attacks of our enemies.

Prayer.

O Lord, it is Thy holy will that our confession should come from the heart. None other Thou wilt have, saying, "My son, give Me thine heart." A confession without faith is therefore worthless. But, on the other hand, Thou requirest also that we should confess with our mouth that faith which we have in our hearts: "Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven." Let us, then, always be ready to confess Thee before men. Amen.

From darkest night and cruel plight,
God, in the Reformation,
His Zion freed and forth did lead
To light and consolation;
He gave His Word, which, as a sword,
The binding chains did sever,
And Pope's decree and masses' fee,
Old errors, fell forever.

37. Why Do We Call Ourselves Lutherans?

If this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to naught; but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it. *Acts 5, 38. 39.*

Why and in what sense do we still to-day call ourselves Lutherans? Perhaps you consider this question unnecessary; you say, "I am born a Lutheran, and I shall ever remain a Lutheran." But no man is born a Lutheran. He is born a sinner, a child of Adam, and he becomes a child of God only by grace, through faith in his Savior. Why am I a Lutheran? The best reply is the one which George, Margrave of Brandenburg, gave during the time of the Reformation, namely: "I am not baptized in the name of Luther; he is not my God and Savior; I do not believe in him and am not saved by him. And therefore in such a sense I am not a Lutheran. But when I am asked if with heart and mouth I profess the doctrine which God has restored to me through His blessed instrument Dr. Luther, then I entertain no scruples about calling myself a Lutheran, nor do I fear to do so; and in that sense, I am, and will remain, a Lutheran all my life."

The Lutheran faith is none other than the faith which filled the hearts of all believers of the Old Testament. It is the faith that filled Peter and John when they stood before the high priest at Jerusalem and courageously declared, "We must obey God rather than men." It is the faith that filled the apostles when they went out into all lands, and the faith that cheered all the holy martyrs to confess Christ in the face of a painful death. In short, it is the faith taught by the prophets and apostles, Jesus Christ Himself being the Corner-stone.

I am a Lutheran because the Lutheran Church expresses in its outward organization the character of the invisible Church; it teaches me to submit to the authority of Christ, and to that alone; it holds before my eyes Christ, and Him crucified, as my only Savior; it brings to me the Sacraments as Christ instituted them; it introduces me into a spiritual democracy such as the ungodly cannot possess. Indeed, the glory of the Lutheran Church is second to none, the glory which God has graciously bestowed upon her. Lutherans would be ungrateful if they did not appreciate this gift. Truly, we need not be ashamed of the history of our Church. Let us believe and live so that our dear old Lutheran Church need not be ashamed of us.

Prayer.

O Lord, grant us grace to work hand in hand for the purpose of carrying on the glorious work of our dear Lutheran Church. Grant unto Thy Word all speed and let it be readily accepted by those who hear it, that Thy house may be filled. Render us willing to entreat others to come to Thee, to carry on the blessed mission-work with zeal and fervor; and on the Last Day let us see that our work has not been in vain. O Lord, we are living at a time of much counterfeit religion, shams, and semblances. Let us, therefore, all the more carefully guard the precious heirloom of our, the Lutheran, faith. And make us willing to help others as we have been helped. Amen.

We believe the chosen angel
Sent to do the work
Was the man who preached th' evangel
Pure at Wittenberg —
Doctor Martin Luther, whom God gave the light
Of the Gospel faith to banish error's night.

38. The Holy Scriptures.

From a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. *2 Tim. 3, 15.*

The first writer of the Bible was Moses; then came Joshua, later Samuel; then David, Solomon, Isaiah, Jeremiah, and the other prophets to Malachi, who lived about 450 years before Christ. The sacred writings of these holy men of God, who wrote their books by inspiration of the Holy Ghost, were collected by the scribe Ezra and together formed the Old Testament.

In the New Testament the work of Christ and the apostles is described in the four gospels and in the Acts of the Apostles. Then the epistles were written to the newly founded Christian congregations, and finally came a prophetic book, the Revelation of St. John. The thirty-nine books of the Old Testament are written in Hebrew, the twenty-seven of the New Testament in Greek. These sixty-six books are called the Canonical Books, because they form the canon, or rule, of faith and life.

The Bible is the most popular book; it is the oldest book, and yet the newest book. "It is," as President Lincoln remarked, "the best gift God has given to man. All the riches of the Savior are communicated through this Book. Whatever is desirable for man is contained in it." It is the most generally adopted book of religion, appealing to every nation under the sun and to every mood and experience of the human heart; a book for kings and peasants, for the learned and the simple, the aged and the young. It is the richest book, full of useful information of every kind, a treasure of the choicest poetry, and the finest collection of beautiful prose literature that was ever written. It is the profoundest book, containing the deepest thoughts ever conceived by man. It is the one divine book in the world, God's own Book, the Word of God. It is the only norm and standard of truth, the only guide to salvation.

There are now a great many books from which a man may learn the way of salvation; but originally all these were taken from the Bible. Other books teach the way of salvation only in as far as they are taken from the Bible.

Prayer.

Blessed Lord, who hast caused the entire Holy Scripture to be written for our learning and who didst say: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me," grant that we may hear, read, learn, and heed them, and meditate upon them, that through patience and comfort of Thy holy Word we may embrace, and ever hold fast, the blessed hope of everlasting life, which Thou hast given us in our Lord Jesus Christ; to whom be praise and glory in time and eternity. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide,
For round us falls the eventide;
Nor let Thy Word, the heavenly light,
For us be ever veiled in night.

39. It Stood the Severest Tests and All the Storms of Time.

Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away. *Luke 21, 33.*

The Bible cannot be destroyed; it is God's Book. For twenty centuries a terrific warfare has been waged against it, but all in vain. It stands to-day as unshaken as it did thousands of years before. It has stood the severest tests, throughout which it has been gloriously confirmed. It has been attested by countless miracles and signs, the reality of which even the most rabid enemies have been forced to admit. It has been attested by millions of martyrs, who have cheerfully sealed their faith with their blood, being divinely persuaded of the truth of the Scriptures. It has been attested by its miraculous preservation up to this hour despite all efforts of the wise and mighty to banish it from the face of the earth.

Through the first three centuries of the Christian era the devil summoned up all his wit and ingenuity to do away with this Book, but failed. Edicts were issued by powerful emperors to burn all the Scriptures in order to root out Christianity, but in vain. Orders were issued to burn the Christians because they honored the Bible and thus to uproot the Christian religion, but without avail. The military and the political powers of the Old World made war upon it, but all in vain. Then, under the Pope, the people were forbidden to read the Bible; everything was tried to discredit the Bible's teaching or to suppress it; nevertheless it stands unscathed and has been spread among well-nigh all known tongues of the globe, everywhere performing its glorious mission. Years ago a school of criticism arose which taught and still teaches: This and that in the Bible is not true. This new "learning" is now being peddled in most of our American universities, — but the Bible still stands. A book that has successfully withstood so many centuries of the devil's heaviest artillery is not going down before the air-guns of modern criticism. For heaven and earth shall pass away, but the Lord's words shall not pass away.

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we pray Thee so to govern and guide us by Thy Holy Spirit that we may with all our heart hear and receive Thy Word and amend our lives in accordance with it. Grant, we beseech Thee, that the enemies of Thy sacred Word may learn to see the error of their way, consider well the punishment now and hereafter in store for them, and turn to Thee in true penitence, so that they may, by Thy grace in Christ, be saved with us forever; through the same Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Why should the wicked move you?
Heed not their craft and spite!
Your Savior, who doth love you,
Will scatter all their might.

He comes, a King most glorious,
And all His earthly foes
In vain His course victorious
Endeavor to oppose.

40. Divine Inspiration.

All Scripture is given by inspiration of God. *2 Tim. 3, 16.*

Inspiration means "breathing into." Thus on the Day of Pentecost the disciples were all filled with the Holy Ghost and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance. They spoke by inspiration. Similarly the Spirit moved the holy writers to speak and write and gave them the thoughts, and with the thoughts the words they were to utter. God operated with and through their minds and hands, and thus what they wrote was wholly the infallible Word of God.

However, the holy men of God who wrote and spoke were permitted to retain their own individuality with all its marks and touches. The Holy Ghost filled the sacred writers in such manner as to let every one of them follow out his own line of investigation and to allow him to keep his own characteristic style. But though the Bible was written by a number of men; though we find in it a great variety as to form and contents; though the holy writers were shepherds, fishermen, physicians, priests, prophets, artisans, statesmen, generals, kings; men with a great diversity of culture, some writing prose and others poetry, — yet we note a most wonderful harmony of the entire Scriptures. This points to one Intelligence. "Holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." "They spoke not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth." This alone accounts for the fact that the Bible, though written by many, is strictly a unity.

The real Author of the Bible is God. The words of Holy Scripture are God's own words. All that the Bible says is true. We may fully trust in all its historical and astronomical data as well as in all its prophecies, in the account given of the creation of the world as well as in all its records of heavenly things. In short, the whole Bible, from cover to cover, is true. God cannot err.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, reign in us and rule over us and bring into complete captivity every thought to the obedience of Thee and Thy Word that we may be ready to believe all that the holy men of God spoke by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost and increase in the knowledge of Thee, and be strengthened with all might, according to Thy glorious power, till we all come in the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of Thee, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of Thy fulness. We thank Thee from our inmost hearts for the precious gift of Thy inspired Word. Amen.

The Word they still shall let remain
And not a thank have for it;
He's by our side upon the plain
With His good gifts and Spirit.

41. Our English Version of the Bible.

Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path.
Ps. 119, 105.

In 1604 a conference convened in England at the call of King James to settle some burning questions which had arisen with the Puritans. In the midst of the discussion the Puritans claimed that the Bible translations were faulty and that a revision was needed, in fact, that *one* Bible was needed which would be accepted by all. On this one point King James agreed with the Puritans, and he laid plans for the revision of the existing translations. In July, 1604, he appointed fifty-four men with the order to carry out this revision under the direction of the Archbishop of Canterbury. The archbishop divided the fifty-four men into six groups, assigning to each group a part of the Bible. In each group each man was asked to make his translation and changes independently of the others; and after each had made his notes, they met and compared their translations and finally agreed upon one of those offered.

Whenever they were in doubt as to a certain word or phrase, they would consult with the greatest authorities then living, both in England and upon the Continent. The first edition of this new version of the Bible apeared in 1611. Seven years these men had worked faithfully and diligently.

More than three hundred years have passed since this translation was made, and yet the King James Version stands unequaled, and in all our churches where the English Bible is read the King James Version is being used. In 1881 appeared the first edition of the Revised Version. Many scholars felt that the King James Version contained too many obsolete words, and in some instances the translation might be more accurate. About one hundred men, the ablest scholars of the world, assisted in this revision. In beauty of diction it does not equal the King James Version, but the translation is somewhat more accurate.

Oh, let us well consider what a treasure we have in our English Bible! Let us enjoy our treasure and make full use of it.

Prayer.

O gracious God and Father in heaven, give me grace duly to recognize Thy great benefits and show my lasting gratitude to Thee, not only in words, but by a godly life, serving Thee all the days of my life in holiness and righteousness pleasing unto Thee, until in the blessed eternity I shall see Thee face to face and join the grand choir of the elect in their never-ending hymns of praise and thanks. Amen.

One thing's needful! Then, Lord Jesus,
Keep this one thing in my mind;
All beside, though first it please us,
Soon a grievous yoke we find;
Beneath it the heart is still fretting and striving,
No true, lasting happiness ever deriving.
The gain of this one thing all loss can requite
And teach me in all things to find true delight.

42. "Search the Scriptures."

Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me. *John 5, 39.*

Every book is written to be read. So was the Bible. It is literature, written by God's command, for God's people to read. It contains records, written for the purpose that future generations might read them, study them. The proper method of Bible-study is to search, that is, "to look through and through." Those who would be strong in the faith must first be mighty in the Scriptures. The Bible unsearched is a mine unworked. There is a drifting away from Bible-reading. How few read the Bible every day! And yet Jesus says: "Search the Scriptures." Search to find the hidden treasures. Martin Luther used to teach his children to read the Bible in the following way: First read through one book carefully, then study chapter by chapter, then verse by verse, and lastly word by word; for he said: "It is like a person shaking a fruit-tree: first shaking the tree and gathering up the fruit falling to the ground, then shaking each branch and afterwards each twig of the branch, and, last of all, looking carefully under each leaf to see that no fruit remains." In this way, and in no other, shall we also find the hidden treasures of the Bible. Dig deep into the mine of God's Word, and you will find spiritual wealth, which will enrich you for this life and fit you for the life to come. If we read other books, much rather should we read the Bible.

Yet many who do read the Bible nevertheless do not find the way of salvation in it because they do not read it right. To our human reason the Bible is a closed book. "The natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him." You need the guidance of the Holy Spirit, because the Scriptures are spiritually discerned. The Holy Spirit must lead you into the truth; He must give you the eye of faith to read and understand. Then we shall be able to read and understand the deep things of God.

Prayer.

O Lord, to Thee I commend the labor of my hands; give success to my projects, and let me accomplish what I undertake in Thy name, so that Thy light may cast a bright beam on my path, to Thy praise and glory and to the welfare of my neighbor. Let Thy Word be a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path, through Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. O Lord Jesus, in Thy name and upon Thy Word I will cast out my net. O Lord, help; O Lord, grant success! Amen.

Search ye the Scriptures, Jesus said,
They testify of Me;
And searching them, you will be led
To mansions of the free.

43. Properties of the Bible.

Thy Word is true from the beginning; and every one of Thy righteous judgments endureth forever. *Ps. 119, 160.*

As there is no variableness with God, so likewise *the Word of God is unchangeable and immutable.* Mighty kingdoms and empires have fallen, but the Word of the Lord endureth forever. The visible heavens above us and the earth upon which we sojourn will pass away, but the Word of God will not pass away.

Another property of the Bible is: *it is the sole authority in matters of faith.* Whatever has no Scripture warrant is false doctrine, vain worship. Christ says of the Pharisees: "In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." But all Scripture is profitable for doctrine, and because it is given by inspiration of God, it is God's authoritative Word, given for our salvation.

And as the book of salvation and life, too, the Bible is *all-sufficient.* It declares all the counsel of God, all that is necessary to salvation.

It is, furthermore, *so clear, so perspicuous,* in teaching the way of salvation that even a child can understand it. The Bible is the clearest book ever written, and no person of ordinary intelligence and unprejudiced mind can fail to understand its teachings and to find in it the way of life.

Still another property which the Bible possesses we call its *efficacy,* its *power.* It has the power to save man. Man cannot save himself. The ability to do so inheres in the Scriptures. It has the power to draw the prodigal son away from sin and bondage and wretchedness back to his heavenly Father. It restores to him his lost rights and privileges of a son and heir. It kindles in his heart a new love of God. It frees him from the degrading dominion of sin and beautifies his present life. It extends to him the inspiring hope of a glorious life beyond the grave and gives him strength to triumph over all earthly tribulation.

Prayer.

Lord, our God, let us always in simple faith abide with Thy revealed Word. There we have the advice which Thou from heaven hast given to us. Let us hear Moses and the prophets. Let us beware of deviating from Thy holy Word even by a hair's breadth. Whom Thy Word cannot save, he cannot be saved. Whom Thy voice does not win, he will not, and cannot, be won. Oh, let us prize Thy Word, let us hear Thy voice, let us learn from the confusion of others that those who have all the wisdom of this world are nevertheless helpless in time and eternity if they do not follow Thy Word in simple faith! Amen.

O sinner, let His Word now be
A lamp unto thy feet;
A light upon thy path to see,
A real comfort sweet.

44. Scripture Admits of No Compromise.

If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.
John 8, 31. 32.

Even those who in doctrine declare the word of Scripture to be the Word of God are nevertheless in danger of disobeying the Word of God in practise. This is done by the making of compromises, that is, it is done when the Church maintains only so much of God's Word as the world and worldly-minded Christians are willing to put up with, in other words, as human reason deems compatible with its ideas of what ought to be done or left undone. All the passages bearing upon this question inculcate upon all Christians the duty of abiding in the Word without making any compromise. God says: "Ye shall not add unto the Word which I command you, neither shall ye diminish aught from it." Deut. 4, 2.

While Luther was ever ready to sacrifice life and all for Christ's sake, he was never willing to yield one jot or tittle of the Scriptures. And only those are Lutherans indeed who accept the whole Bible, — not only certain doctrines which appeal to certain groups of men, but everything that the Lord has commanded to teach and observe, — not the Law alone nor the Gospel alone, but the whole revelation of God; not only those parts which appeal to man's fancy and whim, but also those books, chapters, and verses which transcend human reason; not only those parts which contain articles of faith, but also those which contain historical, geographical, geological, astronomical, or any other scientific statements; in short, the whole Bible, unabridged, uncurtailed. For it behooves us to accept all the doctrines revealed to us by God in Holy Writ, also less prominent and less fundamental ones. It must be our earnest concern not to lose or vitiate any one of them. For the doctrines of the Bible form a united and connected whole; all the various parts of this divine unit are wonderfully interwoven, so that it is imposible to restrict any of them without at the same time, in effect, corrupting and destroying the others. "A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump."

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we pray Thee to give us Thy Holy Spirit that He may dwell in our hearts, daily keep us in Thy grace, and protect us in every temptation. Let us never depart from the Word of Truth, but fearlessly confess it. Whether we meet with approval or disapproval, honor or reproach, whether the membership of our congregation be increased or decreased, let us guard against all falsifications of the Gospel. Restrain, we beseech Thee, all enemies of Thy Word, for the sake of the glory of Thy name. Amen.

Away with human wit, say we,
Away with human story;
God's Word to us the light shall be
And to His name all glory.
Forever shall the Church alone
On His pure Word be founded,
And Christ shall be the Corner-stone
On which our faith is grounded.

45. The Bible Is Genuine and Trustworthy.

For the Word of the Lord is right, and all His works are done in truth. ***Ps. 33, 4.***

To judge of a book, we must first examine its contents. The Jews would not believe Jesus because He testified of Himself; but He replied: "Though I bear record of Myself, yet My record is true." And He produced the most conclusive evidence, saying: "The works which the Father hath given Me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of Me that the Father hath sent Me." Jesus and His apostles wrought many divine miracles and thereby proved the genuineness of their message, as Jesus said to His disciples: "Believe Me for the very works' sake." John 14, 11.

Another proof for the genuineness of the Bible and the whole Christian religion we have in the preservation and extension of the Christian Church to this day. It has been attacked and persecuted persistently, but not even the gates of hell prevailed against it.

Infidels and scoffers, critics and persecutors, passed away and are forgotten; but the Word of God and His Church has endured. And then there are the many prophecies which have been fulfilled. The Bible foretold future events, and the fulfilment of all of them proved the Bible true.

Furthermore, the Bible bears witness of itself that it is the Word of God, inasmuch as it teaches a sure and safe way unto salvation, a way in which sinners can be saved — the way of faith in Christ Jesus. The Bible lays before us a plan for the salvation of sinners of which man without the revelation of God could never have dreamed, a plan which God alone could devise and carry out. Search all religions, and not one of them will speak to you of a Savior, a mediator between God and men. The Bible alone brings us this wonderful message that God Himself came to this earth to suffer and die for the sins of all mankind and thus to purchase man from the slavery of Satan to be again His own for time and eternity. The Bible bears witness of itself. Open the Book and examine it. It will not fail to commend itself to you as the wisdom of God and the power of God.

Prayer.

We thank Thee, Lord God, heavenly Father, for the way unto salvation which Thou hast revealed in Thy holy Word. Such a thing no man could ever have imagined, and the Book which tells us of it cannot be of man's making; it was given to man by Thee, who alone couldst devise, execute, and make known such an eternally adorable plan. Thousands using the Scriptures have felt their power. Thy Holy Spirit, through the Bible, worketh in us the conviction that Thy Word is truth. And what a blessed influence this Word hath exerted on mankind! It is a true comforter of the soul. Let it always be unto us the joy and rejoicing of our hearts. Amen.

Let me be Thine forever,
Thou gracious God and Lord,
Let me forsake Thee never
Nor wander from Thy Word.
Lord, do not let me waver,
But give me steadfastness
And for such grace forever
Thy holy name I'll bless.

46. Human Reason Must Submit to the Word of God.

Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ. *2 Cor. 10, 5.*

Jesus says: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed." To continue in Christ's Word means to abide by the Word of God, to accept and believe all its doctrines, in spite of all that reason or the wisdom of man may say. Man has no right to add to, or to subtract from, the divinely inspired Word of God. Human reason is not able to fathom the depths of God's Word; but Christ demands that reason submit to faith, knowing that God does not and cannot lie.

Christians, most certainly, do not despise nor undervalue human reason. They regard it as a wonderful light created in the human soul. Yet Christians do not make human reason their god. They know that there is a right use of reason and that there is also an abuse of it. It is an abuse of reason when men want to penetrate into, and solve, the mysteries of God. Reason was intended to be a light in earthly things, and it was not given us to search out the secrets of God. For divine and heavenly things God has given us His Word. In things pertaining to the salvation of the soul this Word, and it alone, is to be our guide. We must accept and believe what God has deigned to reveal to us just as it reads. That is the very thing God demands of us. Again and again we are enjoined: "Hear the Word of the Lord"; "Thus saith the Lord." We are bidden to "bring into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ." That is the attitude of the Lutheran Church over against the Bible, the Word of God. God speaks in this Book, and we should say: "Speak, Lord; Thy servant heareth." God speaks. What does He say? "What readest thou?" This is the all-important question. The *how* we leave to God. Such is the attitude of the true disciples of Christ. When in the Word of God we find things which transcend our understanding, we must content ourselves to abide within the limits of the written Word and must not attempt to search beyond it.

Prayer.

O Father of all mercies, who through Thy Word and the Holy Spirit gatherest a holy congregation and Church upon earth and keepest it with Jesus Christ in the true faith, we pray Thee that

Thy little flock, the true believers, who through Thy grace have received Thy Word and honor and cherish it, may be kept firm and steadfast in the pure and only-saving doctrine, continue in Thy Word, which is the truth, and avoid all those things that are contrary to our Christian profession. Grant us grace always to submit to the words of Holy Writ and to follow all such things as are agreeable to Thee; through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, our Lord. Amen.

If we continue in His Word,
The truth we then shall know,
And by His truth our dearest Lord
True freedom will bestow.

47. The Purpose of the Bible.

And that from a child thou hast known the Holy Scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus. *2 Tim. 3, 15.*

The Bible often refers to history and different forms of government, to geography and natural science, to poetry and the wisdom of life. And what it says of these things is absolutely reliable. Yet it was not given for the purpose of teaching us things like these, which man is left to find out by experience and by advancing in knowledge. Neither is the Bible simply to be a text-book of morality. True, the Bible teaches morality. It contains the Ten Commandments, which teach a perfect morality, showing man "how he ought to walk and to please God" and to be holy even as He is holy. And yet the purpose of God in giving man His Word was not simply to improve his earthly character. His purpose was another, namely: "to make us wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus."

The purpose of the Bible is to show us Christ, the Savior. It represents Christ as the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world; as the great Mediator, in whom the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men. The Holy Scriptures testify of Christ. He is the Sun that lights up the sacred record from Genesis to Revelation. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God and Jesus Christ, whom Thou hast sent." There is life in the Word. It testifies of Christ as our Teacher, Redeemer, and Lord, and therefore, by searching the Scriptures, we have eternal life. The Word of God is the power of God unto salvation. Everywhere in the Old as well as in the New Testament the central theme is: salvation by faith in Christ Jesus. All that Scripture teaches has this one object — to make man wise unto salvation, that is, to lead him to a true knowledge of his sins, but, above all, to make him know his Savior and to kindle faith in him, to instruct him to walk in the way of righteousness after having accepted Christ, and to keep him therein in true faith to his blessed end.

Oh, what a blessed purpose Scripture has!

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, who didst say: "Search the Scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life; and they are they which testify of Me," behold, without Thee we can do nothing; for the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; they are foolishness unto him, neither can he know them. We beseech Thee, therefore, enlighten the eyes of our understanding and give us the Spirit of wisdom and revelation that we may behold wondrous things out of Thy Law. Teach us to know what is the hope of our calling, so that we may be made wise unto salvation, setting our hearts on things above and not upon things on the earth. Amen.

Seek first the things that are above
And not the things below;
For all that we here dearly love
Must some day surely go.
But to be heirs of greatest joy,
We must the Word of God employ.

48. The Bible Must Be the Only Rule and Guide of Faith and Life.

Seek ye out of the Book of the Lord and read; no one of these shall fail, none shall want her mate; for My mouth, it hath commanded, and His Spirit, it hath gathered them. *Is. 34, 16.*

Man is born in spiritual blindness, knowing not the way of salvation. To find the way everlasting, he must have a guide to lead him. This guide must be an unerring guide in whom he can put full confidence. The word of Scripture is the one and only true guide in the way of salvation.

Continuing in the Word, we cannot err in the way. Scripture cannot lead us a wrong way, for it is God's own Word. Being God's Word, the Bible is an unerring guide, the infallible light for our life. Nothing else occupies a secondary place next to the Bible, and by nothing else is the Bible to be interpreted. All appeals in matters of Christian doctrine must be made to the Bible, and the Bible, and it alone, decides such matters. Says the Church of Rome: "You must also accept the unwritten traditions of the Church," that is, the Roman Church. Others say: "Reason is our guide, science is our light." We answer: Traditions are sayings of the early Fathers; but these Fathers have often erred and at times contradict the Scriptures. Traditions, it is manifest, are a human element and therefore not a trustworthy guide in matters spiritual. And what are reason and science? Only the maid; Scripture is the mistress.

Woe unto the Church that is built on the quicksand of human opinions! Says Daniel Webster: "Without the Bible man would be in the midst of a sandy desert, surrounded on all sides by a dark, impenetrable horizon." Only then are we true sons and daughters of the Lutheran Church, the Church of the Reformation, when the Bible, and it alone, is the guide and rule of our faith. What rendered our fathers so strong and invincible as to enable them to stand their ground, although the world and a faint-hearted, unionistic Church continually predicted that they would have a speedy fall? It was because they placed themselves unconditionally upon the Word of God.

Prayer.

O Lord, we are prone to take things lightly; each one walks his own way, as it seems right to him. Stablish our hearts, so that we may walk upon no other path than the one that leads to Thee and to Thine imperishable glory. This path, however, is Thy Word, our only rule and guide. Let this Word strengthen us, so that we may place ourselves unconditionally upon it. O Lord, evil men and seducers wax worse and worse. The spiritual outlook is dark and gloomy. The night cometh when no man can work. Oh, lead us by the light of Thy Word on the way to heaven, to Thy glory, where we shall be with Thee forever. Amen.

A trusty weapon is Thy Word,
Thy Church's buckler, shield, and sword;
Lord, let us by this Word abide
That we may seek no other guide.

49. The Chief Parts of Christian Doctrine.

These words which I command thee this day shall be in thine heart; and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children.
Deut. 6, 6. 7.

Our Lutheran Catechism, in the First Chief Part, treats of the Ten Commandments, the divine Law, and in the Second Chief Part of the Gospel, or the doctrine of faith. The Law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ. No one can truly believe in Christ unless he has previously, by the Law, come to a true knowledge of his sin and the divine curse resting upon sin, which the Law proclaims to all transgressors. Only the penitent sinner is willing to accept Christ as his Redeemer and to seek forgiveness in and through Him. So the Small Catechism shows us from the beginning that it does not teach us a dry, scientific system of doctrines, but points out to us a way of salvation answering the question, "What shall I do to be saved?" It pictures to us living Christianity as it is felt and experienced in the heart of all true Christians.

In the Third Chief Part we learn how we may approach the heavenly Fountain of divine love and take from it blessings and grace in abundance. In the Fourth Chief Part we hear of Baptism, which means so much to us. Through it God received us into His Kingdom of Grace. When we were baptized, Christ covered us with the robe of His righteousness, and the Triune God made a covenant with us and we with Him. Baptism is a source of strength and comfort to us when sin and conscience oppose us. The Fifth Chief Part is the Office of the Keys, which tells us of the functions and the power of the Church: "to forgive the sins of penitent sinners unto them, but to retain the sins of the impenitent as long as they do not repent." And finally in the Sixth Chief Part of our Christian doctrine, in the Lord's Supper, God strengthens our weak faith by giving us Christ's body and blood as a seal of the forgiveness of our sins. Thus we see that our daily Christian life is a continual repetition and living over again of the chief parts of the Christian doctrines as contained in our Lutheran Catechism.

Prayer.

O dearest Lord Jesus, I render Thee heartfelt thanks that Thou hast revealed Thyself unto me in the writings of the holy prophets and apostles, to the end that I might believe in Thee and through faith in Thee have eternal life. Let me daily and earnestly consider the chief parts of Christian doctrine, which, indeed, are no child's play. Let each one take heed and likewise consider it a serious matter, for Thou wilt not be mocked. Keep me, I beseech Thee, steadfast in the true faith unto life eternal. Amen.

Word of the everlasting God,
Will of His glorious Son,
Without Thee, how could earth be trod
Or heaven itself be won?

Lord, grant us all aright to learn
The wisdom it imparts
And to its heavenly teachings turn
With simple, childlike hearts.

50. The Ten Commandments.

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; a good understanding have all they that do His commandments. His praise endureth forever. *Ps. 111, 10.*

The Ten Commandments are the holy will of God, or the divine Law. Can you imagine a more perfect law than one framed by God? The Law of God is perfect in that it covers all our obligations. All our duties are named in the two tables of the Decalog. The First Table comprises the first three Commandments, telling us our duty to God; it looks up and down. The Second Table, comprising the last seven Commandments, looks right and left, telling us our duty to our neighbor. The First Table teaches piety; the Second Table teaches probity. The First Table teaches the right creed; the Second Table teaches the right life.

Every phase of life, every case of conscience, every motive of action, is taken into account in the Law of God. Nothing in it is superfluous; nothing is wanting. True, much is commanded that was meant only for the Jews. And now, after the Jewish state is ended and Christ has come and the foreshadowings have been fulfilled, those special laws have lost their significance and are no longer binding. But it is altogether different with what God tells us in the Ten Commandments: how we are to be and what we are to do or not to do. This He also commands in the New Testament, which is written for all men without any exception.

Yea, this Law is by nature written in every man's heart, though not the very *words* of the Ten Commandments, yet their sense and meaning. This is the natural Moral Law, which every man, as it were, knows of himself. Also the heathen, who have not the written Law, the Ten Commandments, know what according to the Ten Commandments is right or wrong in the sight of God. In consequence of sin, however, this knowledge of the Law is much obscured, and in some men there is very little left of it. When, therefore, God chose the children of Israel to be the people of His covenant and to serve Him according to His pleasure, He was not satisfied with the remainder of this knowledge of the Law, but declared His holy will to all men in the Ten Commandments.

Prayer.

O almighty, holy, and righteous God, we humbly beseech Thee that Thou wouldst, for the sake of the perfect obedience of Thy dear Son, graciously forgive us our manifold sins wherewith we have broken Thy holy Law and provoked Thy just indignation against us. Give us ever by Thy Law a due sense of our sins and by Thy Gospel the confident assurance that for the sake of the merits of Christ our sins will be forgiven, and that Thy strength will be made perfect in our weakness. May it please Thee to graft in our hearts true obedience, that we may delight in Thy Law after the inward man and serve Thee in newness of spirit. May we love Thee, O God, above all things and our neighbor as ourselves, not in word only, but in truth. Amen.

No service in itself is small,
None great, though earth it fill;
But that is small which seeks its own
And great which seeks God's will.

51. The First Commandment.

Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. *Matt. 4, 10.*

The First Commandment reads thus: "Thou shalt have no other gods before Me." God says to every soul: "I am the Lord; that is My name; and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images." He is the only true God, and therefore all mankind should adore and worship Him. But, alas! all the world has forsaken Him.

There are the fools, who say, "There is no God." There are the heathen nations, who bow down before an idol of their own imagination. The world is far from the true God. It burns its incense to other gods. Some say, Nature is god. The Mohammedans believe in Allah. The Jews and Unitarians deny the divinity of Christ. The great majority of men worship the god of this world, the prince of darkness, who blinds their understanding.

And what about us? Are not the Christians also tempted with idolatry? Or is God wrong when He proclaims with a voice of thunder that all the world *is* idolatrous? Are there not many idols that they fear, love, and trust in? Are they not continually tempted to make mammon their god, to trust in riches and earthly goods? Take warning, then, and be on your guard when the love of money, which is the root of all evil, seeks to fasten its fangs upon your heart, when avarice and greed seize upon you. You cannot serve God and mammon. You must worship the Lord alone, and Him only must you serve.

And, verily, it is well to serve a Lord so gracious, merciful, and kind! His yoke is gentle and His burden light. He gives us abundantly, not only of spiritual and temporal gifts in general, but the very store with which to serve Him: willingness of heart and mind, true faith, love and gratitude to Him. For every service not based upon gratitude to God for His tender mercies and not begotten of faith in Jesus is a vain service and ill-pleasing to our heavenly Father. Hence, if your service is to be a right service, pleasing to God, see that you serve Him willingly.

Prayer.

O holy and righteous God, Thou alone art God, and besides Thee there is none other. Yet such is our innate wickedness and perversity that we do not fear, love, and trust in Thee as we ought, but give the service of our hearts and hands to many other gods. Forgive us, we beseech Thee, for our dear Redeemer's sake and give us grace to renounce henceforth every allegiance to him who is the ancient enemy of God and man and not again to place our confidence in man or to lean on our own understanding. For this, we pray Thee, give us Thy Holy Spirit. Amen.

Holy Spirit, all divine,
Dwell within this heart of mine;
Cast down every idol-throne,
Reign supreme — and reign alone.

52. We Should Fear, Love, and Trust in, God Above All Things.

Trust in the Lord with all thine heart and lean not unto thine own understanding. *Prov. 3, 5.*

Our whole duty to God is summed up in the words: "Thou shalt love the Lord, thy God, with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind." We should *love* God. By nature we are in such a depraved state that we are utterly incapable of loving God. By nature we love anything else than God. "The carnal mind is enmity against God." By nature we all hate God despite His love toward us, and before we can be made to love God, our sinful hearts must be changed. And if, by the working of God's Holy Spirit, true faith has been engendered in us, we begin to love God in return, who first loved us. But how should we love God? He requires of us no mere outward manifestations of regard, but demands the worship of heart and soul and mind. At every moment we should try to delight and honor Him. We should hold conversation with Him in prayer without ceasing. And we should gladly hear Him speak to us in His Word.

And we should *fear* God. We should fear Him "above all things." But does not the Bible say, 1 John 4, 18: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear"? The answer is this: There are two ways of fearing God. The one is that servile fear which avoids God's presence in order to escape His punishment. The other is that childlike reverence in which awe is blended with affection. This fear renders service to God from tender reluctance of offending Him.

And we should *trust* in God. We should fully rely on Him at all times. We should firmly believe that He will bless the labor of our hands and that He will provide us with all that we need. Do not lean on the frail supports of this earth. With true faith and trust of your heart cling only to God. "It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man."

Prayer.

Grant me grace, O Lord God, to serve Thee, the highest Lord in heaven and on earth, in true knowledge and unfeigned fear, love Thee above all things, place all hope of my salvation in Thee, and walk in Thy commandments without blame. Let all that I do tend to Thy divine honor and to a blessed exercise of my faith, for the sake of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, who liveth and reigneth with Thee and the Holy Ghost to all eternity. Amen.

Fear, love, and trust we need to cultivate,
Our faint hearts are so ready to despair,
So prone to cry: The burden is too great
For us to bear.
He sends the bitter who has sent the sweet,
And it is best,
And often 'tis in sorrow and defeat
That we are blessed.

53. The Second Commandment.

According to Thy name, O God, so is Thy praise unto the ends of the earth; Thy right hand is full of righteousness. *Ps. 48, 10.*

It is necessary that we should be taught the different parts of true godliness, lest we follow the evil inclinations of our depraved heart, thinking thus to serve God. Therefore God has given us nine more Commandments with a number of requirements, which result from the First Commandment. For the fear and love of God should move us to keep them. Rightly Luther begins his explanation of every Commandment with the words: "We should fear and love God." The right attitude of the heart to God is a duty which every commandment requires of us. And mainly by the words we utter it becomes apparent what is in our hearts. "Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaketh." Matt. 12, 34. Therefore in the Second Commandment God lays down a rule for the tongue, making it obedient to the First Commandment.

He says: "Thou shalt not take the name of the Lord, thy God, in vain." In Ex. 20, 7 God added: "For the Lord will not hold him guiltless that taketh His name in vain." What is God's name? God's name is God Himself as He has revealed Himself to us. Thus Jehovah is the Lord God; Sabaoth is God; Christ is God. God Himself, God's person and essence, is meant when we read or hear or speak His name.

If you speak of the Almighty, you name God Himself. If you swear by God's holiness you swear by God Himself. If I come to you with God's Word or command, I come to you with God's name and bring to you God Himself. God reveals Himself in everything He says in the Bible. We cannot sever God from His names. And now the Second Commandment tells us that we are not to take the name of God *in vain.* Taking God's name in vain is every misuse or abuse of it. We should not use it thoughtlessly, triflingly, unprofitably, much less blasphemously. We should not use it to further or to cloak selfish ends, but only when it serves to glorify God or to edify man.

Prayer.

O Lord, who hast revealed Thyself as a God of wisdom and power, of righteousness and grace, we beseech Thee, let us never use Thy holy name in vain, but let us ever employ it for our own and our neighbor's good and Thy great praise. O Lord, we have not hallowed Thy name as we ought, and we beseech Thee for Thy mercy's sake to blot out our transgressions. Grant us also increasing knowledge of Thy wisdom, power, and goodness, that, with a reverent regard for Thy eternal being and purposes, we may never misuse Thy great name to cloak wickedness with a semblance of godliness. Hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, our Lord. Amen.

Direct, control, suggest, this day
All I design or do or say,
That all my powers, with all their might,
In Thy sole glory may unite.

54. The Sin of Cursing.

Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be. *Jas. 3, 10.*

By cursing by God's name, which Luther mentions in his explanation of the Second Commandment, all *blasphemy* is meant. We read in the third book of Moses, Lev. 24, 15. 16: "Whosoever curseth his God shall bear his sin. And he that blasphemeth the name of the Lord, he shall surely be put to death." From this we see what the Scriptures mean by cursing. If a man blasphemes the name of the Lord and speaks of God in such a way as if He were not the holy and majestic God, that is cursing by God's holy name. This sin is committed very often. The Lord God complains Is. 52, 5: "My name continually every day is blasphemed." And of these latter days before the end of the world the apostle prophesied that especially much blasphemy would be in vogue. This time has come. Men to-day utter impious, arrogant, contemptuous, reproachful words respecting God and sacred things. They say that God is powerless and unjust. They ridicule the Bible and the entire Christian religion. Blasphemy is a sin as heinous as it is common.

Cursing by God's name also means *to invoke upon oneself or others the wrath and punishment of God.* This is commonly understood by cursing. With such cursing the world is filled. Many draw God into their wicked cause and treat His holy name with levity. They have the effrontery of calling upon God to become the tool of their wicked purpose, or when they curse thoughtlessly, as, alas! is done so often, they thereby show their contempt of God.

Let us beware lest we be betrayed into this sin by our sinful flesh. Let us ever be on our guard, remembering that we have no right to curse any one. The fear and love of God is incompatible with cursing. God gave us our tongue to pray, praise, and give thanks, not to abuse His holy name or to imprecate evil upon our fellow-men. We received the boon of speech for blessing, not for cursing. Let us not regard this sin as a small matter. "Only acknowledge thine iniquity that thou hast transgressed against the Lord, thy God." Blessed is he who seeks forgiveness for Christ's sake.

Prayer.

Merciful God, gracious Father, I beseech Thee to guard me from all ills of body and soul, so that I may rest secure from the wiles and the power of the devil and from vain and vile speech, thus living to Thy glory and showing love of my neighbor. I pray Thee, for the sake of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, graciously forgive all sins I have committed against Thee in thought, word, and deed, and remember them no more in all eternity. I commend myself into Thy hand; Thou hast redeemed me, Thou faithful God. Amen.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness;
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

55. Swearing by God's Name.

Let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay; for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil. *Matt. 5, 37.*

The Lord says in the Third Book of Moses: "Ye shall not swear by My name falsely, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God." From these words we see that swearing is forbidden.

Does that mean that all swearing is forbidden? No, that is not the meaning of that passage. It certainly is not wrong to call upon God. If it is an important case and the glory of God and the welfare of our neighbor render it necessary, it cannot be wrong thus to call upon God. We have a direct command to swear thus. In the last book of Moses, Deut. 6, 13, we read: "Thou shalt fear the Lord, thy God, and serve Him, and shalt swear by His name." If we swear to the truth of a statement of ours before the proper authorities, let it be done to the glory of God and to the welfare of our fellow-men.

The question, then, arises: *What manner of swearing is forbidden?* The answer is: All false, blasphemous, frivolous swearing and all oaths in uncertain things. *False swearing, or perjury,* invokes the vengeance of God. When one swears to do an evil deed, it is a *blasphemous oath.* It is *frivolous swearing* when the importance of an oath is not considered, or when an oath is unnecessary. It is frivolous and thoughtless if people frequently say, "God knows," "By God," or call upon the dear name of Jesus in vain. This is swearing, calling upon God as witness to the truth of our statement.

Let us watch our tongue and ever be on our guard. Parents should never allow their children to use such expressions, and they should be very careful not to give them a bad example. Also this is frivolous and therefore forbidden swearing, when one utters an oath *in uncertain things.* No one should swear to anything of which he is not absolutely certain. No one should swear to do something the nature of which he does not as yet know, or to keep secret things which he will not know until some time in the future. The grave nature of such an oath may be seen from the case of King Herod. Let us always bear in mind the sacredness of an oath, considering the greatness of God's name.

Prayer.

O Thou just and gracious God and Father, I humbly and sorrowfully confess that I have not only been conceived and born in sin, but that I have also frequently transgressed Thy holy Ten Commandments in thought, word, and deed, thereby fully deserving both temporal and eternal punishment. But since Thy beloved Son, my dear Savior Jesus Christ, has fully atoned for all my sins, original and actual, by fulfilling the commandments which I have transgressed and by shedding His holy, precious blood, I pray Thee to be gracious unto me for His sake. And give me new strength to amend my life. Let me not swear lightly, but simply say yes or no when I mean that, and no more, lest I take Thy holy name in vain. Amen.

Let me no wrong or idle word
Unthinking say;
Set Thou a seal upon my lips —
This, Lord, I pray.

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56. Using Witchcraft and Spiritism.

There shall not be found among you a witch or a charmer or a consulter with familiar spirits. *Deut. 18, 10. 11.*

Using witchcraft means to "use God's name or Word without His command and to promise to perform supernatural things, such as conjuring, fortune-telling, consulting the dead, and similar satanic arts." Witchcraft, or "curious arts," as it is also called in the Scriptures, therefore is a heathenish art, practised by those who cannot or will not pray to God as their dear Father. No, they resort to secret arts and the power of darkness when natural means do not accomplish what they desire. The world is full of witchcraft. It is practised, or at least resorted to, even by many of those who call themselves Christians. But using witchcraft in any form is employing the devil's help, and this is a sin against God and, if done under cover of His sacred name, is taking that name in vain to adorn the sin of doing the devil service.

Christians, true children of God, who have renounced the devil and all his works, withdraw from such iniquity. They know that "all that do these things are an abomination unto the Lord."

When King Saul had fallen away from the living God, he stole to the witch of Endor. And in our enlightened age men and women still throng about mediums, clairvoyants, and fortune-tellers. *Spiritism* is rampant in our modern large cities. Spiritism is a special branch of witchcraft. It objects to this name, however, and presents itself to the public as modern science and full-fledged truth, yea, as religion and a religious society; and it has millions of members. Spiritism claims to be able to associate with the spirits of the dead. Spiritists contend that departed spirits can speak to the living, help them in many ways, and teach them higher knowledge. But the truth is, that whatever we cannot find out by searching the Scriptures and by natural means is not for us to know, and we should not try to ascertain it, least of all by consulting the devil, our arch-enemy.

Prayer.

O Father of all mercies, defend Thy Church against all the gates of hell, against all the raging and raving of Satan, and let it stand firm and immovable upon the foundation rock on which it is built. Look down from heaven and behold and visit Thy vine and vineyard which Thy right hand hath planted, and the branch which Thou madest strong for Thyself, that it may send out its boughs and that its branches may become large; hedge it round about with Thy shield. Be Thou the Defense of Thy sheep that no man may pluck us out of Thy hand. Amen.

Fear not, O little flock, the Foe
Who madly seeks your overthrow;
Dread not his rage and power.
What though your courage sometimes faints,
His seeming triumph o'er God's saints
Lasts but a little hour.

57. Lying or Deceiving by God's Name.

Behold, I am against the prophets, saith the Lord, that use their tongues and say, He saith. *Jer. 23, 31.*

What is meant by lying or deceiving by God's name? It means to adorn false doctrine or ungodly life with the Word and name of God. Who is mean enough to do that? Who is bold enough to venture it? Must he not fear to be found to fight against God? Yet this same thing is done daily by the thousands of false prophets who deny the true faith, preaching their own erroneous speculations, as well as by the millions who live in sin, but would be accounted saints. God surely does not like such as use their tongues to violate His Word. He says through the prophet Jeremiah that He is *against* such prophets. They preach false doctrine and yet declare, "He saith." They deny the true faith and yet seek to gain credence for doing so. They tear down the Word of God, and yet they use the name of God as a veneer to cover their wicked words. They garble Scripture to suit their own purpose, and yet they render themselves attractive and commendable to many by twisting Scripture into a seeming agreement with their views.

Is this not the same vile method which their lying master, the devil, employed when he tempted Christ? To this day he is an adept in breeding mischief by false doctrine. Are there not false prophets almost everywhere, perverting and distorting the holy Word of God and yet claiming, "Thus saith the Lord"? Is there not a bewildering number of sects, each of them deviating from God's plain Word in some point and yet telling people that they are teaching the pure and unadulterated truth? Remember that you must strictly adhere to the divine Word; then you will not be deceived by them.

However, lying and deceiving by God's name is done not only by false prophets; it is a very common sin. Every display of piety, all show of holiness, of such as live in sin, who thus adorn their ungodly life with the Word and name of God, is condemned in the Second Commandment.

Prayer.

O my dear Savior, how much hast Thou endured, what hast Thou suffered for me to redeem such a worm as I am! Accept my thanks, O Lord, for all Thy suffering and draw me unto Thee that I may cling to Thee in life and in death, live for Thee alone, and despise and hate sin in every shape and form. O Lord, Thou hast said: "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me." Let me beware of such hypocrisy and be Thine forever. Amen.

Thy Zion strews before Thee
Green boughs and fairest palms,
And I, too, will adore Thee
With sweetest songs and psalms.

My heart shall bloom forever
For Thee with praises new
And from Thy name shall never
Withhold the honor due.

58. We Should Call upon God's Name in Every Trouble, Pray, Praise, and Give Thanks.

Whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by Him. *Col. 3, 17.*

True fear and love of God require that we call upon Him. In trouble man feels the need of help, and it is but natural that he looks for help. Especially when our health fails us, or when dire calamities endanger our life, we feel our own weakness and frailty and look for help. To be sure, God suffered us to experience the day of trouble. Since He is the Ruler of heaven and earth and governs all things with His almighty power, He could easily have prevented our trouble. But He did not do so. Why? He wants us to call upon Him in our need.

As the disciples in their great anxiety amid the foaming waves came to Jesus, saying, "Lord, save us: we perish!" and as the woman of Canaan came and cried unto Him, saying, "Have mercy on me, O Lord, Thou Son of David!" thus we, too, should call upon Him in our need for His help and abounding mercy. Else why should He have revealed Himself to us as the merciful and gracious and omnipotent Helper? He wants us to show our confidence in Him by calling upon Him for help. Just ponder the many passages of Holy Writ which speak of this. There is the divine command: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble." There are the innumerable promises of God to hear and help us, such as: "The Lord will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him; He also will hear their cry and will save them." There are the many wonderful examples of God's help in great distress. Should not all this induce us to call upon God's name in every trouble? Our first thought must always be: I shall call upon God; He will help me. And the fear and love of God, our heavenly Father, also implies that we hold *constant* communion with Him in prayer, bringing our petitions before Him with our hearts and lips, confessing our sins, and imploring forgiveness.

Such prayers tend to the honor and glory of God.

Prayer.

O Lord God, we praise Thee that Thou hast recorded Thy holy name among the children of men, that all flesh should bless Thy holy name forever and ever. Let us continually offer up to Thee devout adoration, fervent prayer, and grateful praise and by word and deed confess Thee before men, until in heaven, when we shall see Thee face to face, we shall glorify Thy great and adorable name forevermore. Especially let us praise Thy holy name and give thanks by making known to all mankind Thy wonderful Word as told in the Gospel. Amen.

Thus all my pilgrim way along
I'll sing aloud Thy praises
That men may hear the grateful song
My voice, unwearied, raises;
Be joyful in the Lord, my heart!
Both soul and body, bear your part —
To God all praise and glory!

59. The Third Commandment.

Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God and be more ready to hear than to give the sacrifice of fools; for they consider not that they do evil. *Eccl. 5, 1.*

In the Old Testament, God set apart the seventh day and appointed it for rest, commanding His chosen people to keep it holy above all other days. The observance of the day was minutely specified. No one was to kindle a fire, to carry a burden, to make a journey, or to disturb in any way complete bodily rest. The transgressor was to be put to death. This law was never incumbent on all men. It never bound the Gentiles, and it no longer binds the Jews. With Christ's appearance the Old Covenant was past, and God made a New Covenant with all mankind. For thus we read in the prophet Jeremiah, chapter 31: "Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, that I will make a New Covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah; not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers." And in the Epistle to the Hebrews, chapter 8: "In that He saith, A New Covenant, He hath made the first old. Now, that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away."

As soon as Christ's work of redemption was finished upon the cross and the veil of the Temple had been rent in twain, the Sabbath, too, lost its significance. Paul says of the Sabbath-days Col. 2, 17: "Which are a shadow of things to come, but the body is of Christ." Christ rang the death-knoll of the Old Testament Sabbath, as it were, by His own coming. Therefore He says: "The Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath-day." Matt. 12, 8. In the New Testament we need not observe the seventh day. Whatever in the Third Commandment related to that day has been abrogated and abolished by God Himself; no longer does it bind our consciences.

There is no New Testament law enjoining us to observe a certain day. The early Church set apart the first day of the week, and ever since Sunday has been celebrated, — not indeed by divine command, for there is no such command. We celebrate Sunday in order to have time and opportunity for public worship. We call it the Lord's Day because it was the day of His resurrection. On this day we contemplate the work of our Lord and Redeemer in communion with our fellow-Christians by meeting with them in the house of God.

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we pray Thee so to govern and guide us by Thy Holy Spirit that we may with all our heart hear and receive Thy Word and truly sanctify the Lord's Day, to the end that, in turn, we may be sanctified by Thy Word, that we may put all our confidence and hope in Jesus Christ, Thy Son, amend our lives in accordance with Thy Word, and avoid every offense, until by grace for Christ's sake, we shall enter into that eternal rest which remaineth to the people of God and be saved forever. Amen.

This is the day the Lord hath made;
He calls the hours His own;
Let heaven rejoice, let earth be glad,
And praise surround the throne.

To-day He rose and left the dead,
And Satan's empire fell;
To-day the saints His triumph spread
And all His wonders tell.

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60. We Should Hold Preaching and God's Word Sacred and Gladly Hear and Learn It.

Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it.
Luke 11, 28.

The Church has been charged by her Lord to preach the Gospel to every creature, and all mankind should hear the Word of the Lord. David sings: "So will I compass Thine altar, O Lord, that I may publish with the voice of thanksgiving and tell of all Thy wondrous works. Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house and the place where Thine honor dwelleth." Our spiritual life must always be nourished and strengthened. But this can be done only through the God-given means of grace, Word and Sacrament. Therefore it is necessary to come to the house of God, where we should turn our hearts to God and hear the Word of God and keep it. "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom." "Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is." Already in the early Christian Church there were some who were slow in attending public worship. They were admonished on account of it and told: "He that is of God heareth God's words; ye therefore hear them not because ye are not of God."

When the congregation of the Lord assembles in public worship, no Christian should be absent. Lutheran Christians should be the best churchgoers, the most faithful attendants at the services in the sanctuary. "He that is of God heareth God's words." A true Christian needs no commandments and threats to make him go to church. He will gladly and willingly obey God's Word. Of all true Christians we may say what Paul says of the Thessalonians: "When ye received the Word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but, as it is in truth, the Word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe." "He that heareth you, heareth Me," says Christ. And Christ has the Word of God to speak to us. We should always be glad to come to Him and hear Him speak.

Prayer.

O Lord, almighty God and heavenly Father, I thank Thee from my inmost heart for all the mercy and kindness which, like as a father, Thou hast shown me, and that Thou hast kept me safe from all ills. And as Thy dear child I also beseech Thee graciously to preserve Thy saving Word to me unto my last breath and to enlighten my heart with Thy Holy Spirit that I may know what is good or evil. Let me never use Thy Word triflingly and thus prevent its striking root in my heart; let me never grow indifferent to the worship of Thy holy name. Hear me for the sake of Jesus, my dear Lord and Savior. Amen.

Blessed Jesus, at Thy Word
We are gathered all to hear Thee;
Let our hearts and souls be stirred
Now to seek and love and fear Thee;
By Thy teachings sweet and holy
Drawn from earth to love Thee solely.

61. A Warning Example for Us All.

One thing have I desired of the Lord, that will I seek after — that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life to behold the beauty of the Lord and to enquire in His Temple.
Ps. 27, 4.

Thomas was one of the Twelve. He had joined the Church of Christ and promised to be true to Him. But for some reason or other he was not present in the congregation of believers the Sunday morning when the risen Savior appeared.

A great many fare similarly to Thomas. They promise to be true to the Church of Christ, and still Sundays will find them every place but in church, in the house of God. Therefore they do not receive the benefit of the preaching of the Word, the prayers, the hymns, and the fellowship of the believers. Therefore they neglect the Lord's Supper. And being away from the place where the sacred means of grace are administered, in which Christ comes to us, they begin to doubt. And from doubt they may be led to absolute unbelief, shipwreck of their faith, and be eternally lost.

Christ rebuked His disciple for his faithlessness and doubts. He rebuked him kindly, but nevertheless severely. Let Thomas be a warning example for us all. Let us beware of doubt and faithlessness. Let us be loyal to our Church. Let our pew never be vacant except in cases of absolute necessity. If we desire at all to be saved, then let us not forsake public worship. You need the Church! It is God's own invitation for the salvation of souls.

Thomas missed the loving greeting of Christ, "Peace be with you." Have we not this same Word as well as Thomas? Do you not hear the same Gospel of peace? And is not Christ always present in our midst? Has it not now and then happened that you heard a word which you could not forget, but which has come to you afterwards time and again and moved you to many a God-pleasing deed? And if you have had such experience, you will not say that it makes no difference if you stay at home once instead of going to church.

Prayer.

O Thou Triune God, remit all punishments, though well deserved by me, for former sins and continue to bless me and mine with all spiritual and temporal blessings and with earthly and heavenly gifts. Let Thy grace rise anew over us every morning and do good unto all that seek refuge with Thee and wait upon Thy goodness. Awaken in us all a heartfelt desire for Thy grace. Grant that our highest pleasure and delight may ever center in Thy Word. May nothing be dearer to us in this world than Thy Word, to the praise and glory of Thy most holy and exalted name. Amen.

Father, Son, and Holy Ghost,
Praise to Thee and adoration!
Grant that we Thy Word may trust
And obtain true consolation,
While we here below must wander,
Till we sing Thy praises yonder.

62. The Word of God Is the Foundation of True Christian Faith.

So, then, faith cometh by hearing and hearing by the Word of God. *Rom. 10, 17.*

"He that trusteth in his own heart is a fool," God says in the Book of Proverbs. It is foolish to trust in your own heart, in your feelings and inward experience, if you wish to become certain of your faith. For what guaranty of God's grace can you have if your faith has no better foundation than the delusive feelings of your own heart? Is not man's heart a deceitful and desperately wicked thing? Woe unto those who base their faith on their emotions! Even the inward testimony of God's Holy Spirit may not always be there. Nor must we rest our faith on our own repentance; for our repentance is always imperfect. Nor should we rely upon our own good works; for even the best of lives are damnable if not covered with the righteousness of Christ. All these foundations of faith which men make for themselves are like the quicksand, which gives way under one's feet.

The only sure foundation upon which Christians must rest their faith is the Word of God. For while everything else is unreliable, the Word of God is truthful and can never fail. Whosoever simply relies upon that which God has spoken in His divine Word has based his faith on the true and everlasting foundation on which alone it can securely rest. Though such a believer experience God's anger and wrath in his soul and feel no joy whatever, the Word of God will give him solid ground to stand on and therefore true comfort. Though he suffer tribulations and afflictions, though the world and Satan tempt him, even in the very face of death, nothing will be able to prevail against him. His faith rests on the firm foundation of the inspired Word, which says: "In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins." "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." These are God's words, of which He says: "Heaven and earth shall pass away, but My words shall not pass away." On this sure foundation true faith is built.

Prayer.

We praise and bless Thee, Lord God, for having, out of pure mercy and kindness, so bountifully provided both our body with daily bread and our soul with heavenly food, Thy saving Word. Grant, O faithful God, that this Thy Word may remain in our hearts and work great good to Thine honor and our salvation. Graciously grant that the good resolutions we have formed may not be hindered or come to naught. Take not Thy Holy Spirit from us. Amen.

Come, Holy Spirit, God and Lord!
Be all Thy graces now outpoured
On each believer's mind and heart;
Thy fervent love to them impart.
Lord, by the brightness of Thy light
Thou in the faith dost men unite
Of every tongue and every nation;
We therefore sing with exultation:
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

63. Nothing Must Hinder Us from Hearing the Word of God.

Lord, I have loved the habitation of Thy house and the place where Thine honor dwelleth. *Ps. 26, 8.*

Luther says in his Large Catechism: "Whatever be the hour when God's Word is taught, preached, heard, read, or meditated upon, person, day, and work are then sanctified thereby, not because of the external work, but because of the Word, which makes saints of us all. . . . God will punish all who despise His Word and are not willing to hear and learn it, especially at the time appointed for the purpose." Here Luther says that it is the duty of every Christian to hear and learn the Word of God at the time appointed for that purpose. We should observe Sunday as a day of worship by using the Word of God. We should not let our work keep us from hearing the Word of God. When we are to hear God's Word, we must quit our work.

All Christians should of their own free will quit their work on Sunday, at the time appointed for public worship. There are unbelievers who do not work all week, but Sundays they must work. Why? To show their unbelief. Christians quit their work on Sundays. Why? Not because God has prohibited every work on that day, — for He has not, — but in order that they may have time and opportunity to hear the Word of God in the house of worship. For the main thing is the preaching of the Word of God. To those, therefore, who work on Sundays from habit or anxious concern about their daily bread we say: Rest and go to church; seek first the kingdom of God, and all other things shall be added unto you.

When there is no real necessity, quit your work and go to church. At the time appointed for the public service, Jesus calls: "He that hath ears to hear, let him hear"; and again: "He that heareth you heareth Me; and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me." To all mankind it is said: "O earth, earth, earth, hear the Word of the Lord!"

Prayer.

Lord God, we pray Thee that Thou wouldest not withdraw from us Thy pure Word and the free preaching thereof; nor wrathfully remember the sin desecrating the day on which Thy Word is preached; but rather, we pray Thee, blot out our sins according to Thy great mercy, for the sake of the bitter suffering and death of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ. And we commend ourselves to Thy divine protection and fatherly blessing, for this and all our remaining days in this vale of tears. Preserve unto us Thy saving Word to our last breath, through Christ, our Mediator. Amen.

Grant honor, truth, propriety,
And love Thy Word to ponder;
False doctrines, Lord, keep far from me
And grant both here and yonder
What serves my everlasting bliss;
Preserve me from unrighteousness
In all my life and doings.

64. Christ Is the Center of Every True Service.

He that heareth you heareth Me. *Luke 10, 16.*

God manifested His delight in the worship of the God-fearing people of the Old Testament by His own presence in their Temple.

In Jesus, the Savior, we have the fulfilment of the Old Testament. He was presented to the Lord in the Temple. At the age of twelve He went with His parents to the Temple and sat at the feet of the scribes. During His active ministry He went to the Temple regularly every Passover. And in the present time of grace He, our Lord and Savior, is in His holy temple wherever people, be there ever so few of them, are gathered together to worship Him. For Christ says: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." Christ dwells where the Word and Sacraments are found. Your congregation, too, has

His Word and Sacraments. Where these two things are found in truth and purity, there the Lord's honor dwelleth. The Lord is there within His holy temple. Here in His house He clothes you with the armor in which you shall stand in the battle of life. He comforts you with His Word and promise of final victory, refreshes and strengthens you, and revives your drooping spirit by letting you partake of His own body and blood. In our services Christ leads you to the paths of righteousness for His name's sake. He admonishes you to be firm in faith, perfect in obedience, sincere in love, instant in prayer, unwavering in hope; yea, He fills your heart with the hope of life everlasting.

Christ is the All-in-all of our services. The entire service should be so conducted as to fix the attention of all hearers on this one point — Christ; and all such means should be discarded as might tend to divert the attention from that blessed picture — Jesus, the Savior. When Leonardo da Vinci painted his famous picture "The Lord's Supper," he took the greatest pains to paint the figure of Christ in such a way as would immediately fix the eye of the beholder upon Him. But in one corner of the picture he had painted a little boat, and he noticed that the people admired it very much. He did not like this and blotted out the boat. So also Christ must be the center of all our services.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou eternal Son of God, reveal Thyself to us in all our services. May we realize that out of love to us Thou didst become our Brother and didst redeem us by Thy obedience, suffering, and death, to the end that in Thee we might learn to know the Father aright and through Thee come to Him, enjoying the fruits of Thy redemption, here in righteousness and holiness and hereafter in perfect holiness and bliss in Thy presence. Amen.

Lord Jesus, my Salvation,
My Light, my Life divine,
My only Consolation,
O make me wholly Thine!
For Thou hast dearly bought me
With blood and bitter pain;
Let me, since Thou hast sought me,
Eternal life obtain.

65. Family Worship.

Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom.
Col. 3, 16.

"How the head of the family should teach his household to pray morning and evening," this heading in our Lutheran Catechism points out the duty of every family to maintain family devotion. This plain Christian duty, practised in all ages by God's people, has much fallen into disuse.

Family worship belongs to the good old customs. It was practised by our Lutheran forefathers. After the time of the Reformation it became an almost universal thing in Lutheran lands. And although in our modern times many have abandoned also this good old custom, yet those who first of all seek the kingdom of God and His righteousness should never cease to practise it. Retain your home devotion, or return to it if you have dropped it, and do not omit it if a stranger happens to be a visitor in your house. Be not ashamed of the old way. Family worship is as necessary and as beneficial now as it was in olden times.

The benefits of family worship are many and great. Morning devotion anchors the soul, so that it will not very readily drift far away from God during the day. It draws down upon the domestic circle the blessing of God. We have the assurance that where two or three are gathered in Christ's name, He will be with them. They think of Him. This has a hallowed influence upon the family peace, which so often is threatened. Unkind feelings toward each other will vanish when members of the family unite in prayer. Family discipline will be made easier, and the home more pleasant. The proper rearing of our children demands devotion at home. Such worthy example of the parents will in after-years still be so vivid in the minds of their children and so powerful as to exert a most beneficent influence on them.

The little time devoted to the daily contemplation of God's Word is most profitably spent. If there are seasons when you have no time to spare for private reading, let your Bible be used at least in the family worship. In addition to personal reading and private study of the Bible it should daily be read in the family circle; for, certainly, no Christian house should be without the family altar. Let it be our resolve: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

Prayer.

Dear heavenly Father, grant me grace to take constant delight in Thy Word, so that I gladly hear it, read it, meditate upon it, and with it minister unto others. Let me speak of it day and night, and let my mouth show forth Thy righteousness and praise. For all this I will ever love, bless, and praise Thee, my God and Lord, together with Thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, and the Holy Spirit, evermore thanking and serving Thee, with all the believers and the good angels, to all eternity. Amen.

Unseal our lips to sing Thy praise,
Our hearts in true devotion raise,
Our faith increase, and grant us light
That we may know Thy name aright.

Blest be our house! It prosper well!
In peace and joy the parents dwell!
And in the children's lot be shown
How richly God can bless His own.

66. Spiritual Songs.

Teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.
Col. 3, 16.

Vocal and instrumental music was employed by the chosen people of God ever since they were delivered from the Egyptian thraldom. It gradually developed, until it reached its highest perfection under David and Solomon. By divine direction they appointed four thousand Levites to serve in the Temple as singers and players on instruments. These were appointed to lead and support, by the melody of their voices and the harmony of their instruments, the worshipers assembled in singing the psalms of David, Asaph, and other inspired singers.

In the New Testament Zion we also hear singing of psalms, hymns, and spiritual songs. Then came Antichrist, teaching the Christians to worship by proxy, in a strange language. The Reformation, reviving the singing of sacred hymns and songs by the congregation in the common language of the people, gave birth to a large amount of sacred hymns and music. While others, under the pretense of reformation, cast aside the liturgy and the hymns, Luther and his coworkers purified and preserved the liturgy and hymns as eminently serviceable in public worship.

If there is a Church that may look with especial pleasure upon its collection of sacred songs, it is our beloved Lutheran Zion. There is in our hymns a spirit of divine power; they are the response of our Christian faith, church hymns in the fullest and best sense, not only inspiring and devotional, but educating and instructive, designed to lead and properly direct us in our pilgrimage to the heavenly mansions. Let us rejoice in this good gift which God has bestowed upon us and diligently use it in our churches and homes. It is the noble handmaiden, preceding and following the preaching of the Word, the sweet odors bearing our devotion and sacrifice upward to heaven, in harmony with the sermon. The organ is to beautify the worship, the choir is to lead in singing, but the congregation is to do the singing.

Prayer.

Help me now, O Lord, my God, to begin a new life. Grant that I may at all times magnify Thy name and let Thy praise evermore be in my mouth. Guide me by Thy Holy Spirit that I may live to Thy honor and not yield my members as instruments of unrighteousness to serve sin, but as instruments of righteousness to serve Thee, my God. And I shall in Thy congregation sing songs of praise and glory to Thee all the days of my life. Amen.

Innumerous choirs before the shining throne
Their joyful anthems raise,
Till heaven's glad halls are echoing with the tone
Of that great hymn of praise,
And all its host rejoices,
And all its blessed throng
Unite their myriad voices
In one eternal song.

67. Love Thy Neighbor as Thyself.

All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them. *Matt. 7, 12.*

It has been truly said that when a man loves God, his neighbors will find it out; that is to say, such a man will lead a godly life, he will love also his fellow-men. Love of God results in love of our fellow-men. The love of God is the source and fountain of our Christian attitude to those who, like ourselves, have been created by God and redeemed by Christ.

What is that love which Christ demands of His disciples?

It is the healthy daughter of true faith in Jesus. Its lips overflow with words of kindness; its hands are strong to do some work; its feet are quick to render some useful service. Christian love is quiet, modest, and self-forgetting. It does not seek its own glory. Its sole intention is to serve, to help, and to do its full duty. The true Christian is willing to sacrifice himself, his own person and his own interests, in rendering service to others. That is love, Christian love, patterned after the love of our Savior. This sincere, unselfish love toward all our fellow-beings we should let shine before men. This love never works harm to our neighbor. "Love is the fulfilling of the Law."

It seems easy to love when we hear this admonition of Scripture: "Let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." But perhaps you find it difficult to love your enemies, and yet the Lord says: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." It seems so hard to love our enemies. That is the experience of every one of us. But let us bear in mind that God loves them; He cares and provides for them. If our hearts are filled with love of God, they will also go out in love toward our enemies. And if our love proceeds from faith in Him who first loved us, God will look upon our works of love as if they were done to Him.

Prayer.

O God the Holy Ghost, who dost labor faithfully at the work of our sanctification, Thou hast said: "If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar; for he that loveth not his brother, whom he hath seen, how can he love God, whom he hath not seen? And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also." Oh, what an appeal to us to show love, to banish from our hearts all hatred and malice, to agree quickly with our adversary, to extend the hand of reconciliation, and to do the work of the good Samaritan! Amen.

Work, for the night is coming,
Work through the sunny noon,
Fill brightest hours with labor;
Rest cometh sure and soon.
Give every flying minute
Something to keep in store;
Work, for the night is coming
When man can work no more.

68. The Fourth Commandment.

Children, obey your parents in all things; for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord. *Col. 3, 20.*

"We should fear and love God that we may not despise our parents and masters nor provoke them to anger." Children who disrespect their parents by disobeying them and doing other deeds of wickedness and thus provoke them to righteous anger and sorely grieve them surely are not lovely olive-branches, but sharp and pricking thorns about the family table. They dishonor God by despising their parents.

God says: "*Honor* thy father and thy mother." Our parents are nearest, and ought to be dearest, to us: our father, of whom we have been begotten; our mother, of whom we have been born. Next to God we owe to them our very being. Therefore "honor thy father and thy mother." This is a commandment of the most high God, and woe to him who disobeys it! When children have learned to honor their parents, they can no longer speak of them as "the old man" and "the old woman"; nor will they marry when they have grown to manhood and womanhood without the knowledge and consent of their parents.

Honor to our parents implies that we *serve* them, and that we do so not only when bidden, but whenever an opportunity offers to do something of which we know that it will please them. And we must support, nourish, and cherish them when they grow old and helpless in order to "requite" them as the Bible says, that is, to return in part the loving care which they bestowed upon us when we were young and helpless.

Due honor to our parents demands that we also *obey* them; for the Lord says: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right." And again He says. "Children, obey your parents in all things, for this is well-pleasing unto the Lord." We should obey our parents in all things in which God has placed them over us and esteem them as a precious gift of God. Parents, to a certain extent, are the representatives of God over against their children. Obedient children are the pride of a home and give the hearts of their parents great pleasure.

Prayer.

Almighty God and Father, we confess that we have not honored Thee in Thy representatives, our parents, as we should have done, but have set aside Thy precept and therewith provoked Thy righteous anger. Grant that we may know our sin and repent of it and accept as the atonement for our disobedience the perfect obedience of Thy dear Son. Give to all parents a due sense of their responsibilities and enable them to exercise their office to Thine honor. Give to us hearts that fear and love Thee, that we may honor those whom Thou hast placed in authority over us and render to them obedience and service, love and esteem. Amen.

Give to thy parents honor due,
Be dutiful, and loving too,
And help them when their strength decays,
So shalt thou have length of days.

69. The Duty of Parents.

And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. *Eph. 6, 4.*

Next to the seeking of their own salvation the highest duty of Christian parents is the bringing up of their children in the fear of the Lord. If parents are required to look to the mortal bodies of their children, how much more to their immortal souls! "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old, he will not depart from it." These are the words of the Lord, and they are true.

But why, then, do so many children, even of parents who are professed Christians, turn out bad? Assuredly it is often their own fault. But is it not also true that many parents do not know how to train up a child in the way he should go? To obey its parents is a little child's delight; but parents who have not themselves learned self-control cannot teach their children obedience. To bring up a child in the way it should go, you must go that way yourself. If children are to honor parents, parents ought to honor themselves and each other. If father and mother are rude to each other, it need cause no surprise if their example is followed. Children need good models to follow as their examples. Boys learn honesty and girls modesty not so much from books as from their parents. How many a boy's soul has been poisoned by filthy talk heard from an adult's lips! How many baptized children learn neither prayers nor Bible stories! Parents should teach their children to pray and worship the Lord and urge them and influence them to walk in the ways of the Lord as long as they live.

Here is where they often make a grave mistake. They let their children form their own judgment as to religion. But that is wrong. God demands of you to bring up your children so that they will fear and love Him and trust in Him. That is an express command of God. We should attend to the spiritual need of our children not only before, but also after their confirmation that they may remain faithful and our work may not be in vain.

Prayer.

O heavenly Father, Thou hast appointed and assigned to me my duties; but matters do not always take the turn I would like, and there are so many things troubling and distressing me that I find in myself neither help nor consolation. For this very reason I commit everything to Thee, looking to Thee for counsel and aid. In all these questions be Thou the beginning and the end. Bless all I do. To Thee I will thankfully ascribe all praise for the success of my work. Grant this prayer in Jesus' name. Amen.

With prayer we come before Thy face;
In every home bestow Thy grace
On children, father, mother,
Relieve their wants, their burdens ease,
Let them together dwell in peace
And love to one another.

70. Of Civil Government.

Let every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God; the powers that be are ordained of God.
Rom. 13, 1.

God has given the parents two assistants: the Church and the State. The Church assists the parents in their efforts to bring their children up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, and the State assists them by providing for the secular education of their children and by doing its part in helping them to enforce good order in their homes and families.

The rulers in the State are placed over us by God's ordinance, and we owe them obedience. In our richly blessed country we elect our own officers of the law and regard them as our servants, and hence we are easily inclined to think little of them. It is doubly necessary therefore for us to remember that the civil government is God's ordinance. This is a truth which in our day not only the Anarchists and Nihilists deny, but also the Socialists, who endeavor to undermine and overthrow every existing form of government. God's Word, however, is perfectly clear in this matter also. It makes no difference how a government is constituted, whether it be an absolute monarchy, with its powers and functions chiefly in the hands of one man, or a constitutional monarchy, in which the power is limited by constitutional provisions, or a republic, with the legislative, executive, and judicial powers vested in the people. The question is, Is there an actual government? Has it authority in the land? Is it able to preserve order and to provide for the safety and well-being of the people? If so, then it is of God, then it is entitled to the respect and obedience of every citizen within its boundaries.

An established government, such as ours, is of God. It is ordained of God. It stands in the place of God as far as its power reaches, even as father and mother are the representatives of God in the home. As the Fourth Commandment demands obedience to parents on the part of the children, so it also requires every citizen to obey his government. We must submit to the rulers that have been chosen by the majority of the people. God says: "Let every soul be subject to the higher powers."

Prayer.

O Lord, Thou hast endowed body and soul abundantly with every manner of blessing. How can I find words adequate for the praise I owe Thee? How can I properly show my gratitude? Behold, O Lord, I offer unto Thee the sacrifice of my poor service and glorify Thy grace and mercy with all my strength and powers. In the congregation will I bless Thee. My soul shall honor Thee, my spirit must praise Thee, my mouth shall thank Thee. Bless our country, give us good government. Amen.

God, give us men! A time like this demands
Strong minds, great hearts, true faith, and ready hands:
Men whom the lust of office does not kill,
Men who possess opinions and a will.
Men whom the spoils of office cannot buy;
Men who have honor and who will not lie;
Unflinching men, who live above the fog;
Men who can stand before a demagog
And scorn his scheming treason without winking
In public duty and in private thinking.

71. The Separation of Church and State.

Render unto Caesar the things which are Caesar's and unto God the things that are God's. *Matt. 22, 21.*

This was the authoritative decision of our Lord and Savior. According to these words the interests of the State and the interests of the Church are not the same. We have duties as citizens and duties as church-members. The claims of Caesar, that is, the civil government, must be satisfied, and what God has commanded respecting the service we owe Him is the supreme law for us. Caesar's claims have their limit; he cannot demand our all. We are to render to Caesar the things which are his in such a manner that God receives the things which are His. What are these things?

Those who are born in this country are, by reason of their birth, American citizens, entitled to all the privileges and bound to discharge all duties of a citizen. Those who by the new birth received in baptism are initiated into the commonwealth of God's nation are, by reason of their new birth, fellow-citizens of the saints and of the household of God. Besides these there are, both in the State and in the Church, persons who have not in this ordinary way obtained citizenship, but have *joined* the State and the congregation.

Now, these two domains can never clash because the nature of the two is entirely different. The domain of the Church is spiritual; it rules over souls; it deals with heavenly things; its purpose is to lead people to eternal life; its only weapons are the Word of God and prayer. It promises a crown, and a glorious one, not in this world, however, but in that to come. The domain of the State, however, is merely temporal; it deals with earthly things; its purpose is to protect the bodies and temporal possessions of inhabitants of the country and therefore to make and enforce laws to that end. But any interference of the State in matters of religion is beyond its God-given province; it has no right to regulate the relations between God and man or in any way to meddle in, or interfere with, matters of the Church.

Prayer.

O Lord, grant us all Thy grace to the end that we may perform our duties both in the State and in the Church, be good citizens and faithful Christians, until we shall be translated from this world into Thy glorious kingdom in heaven, where there are pleasures forevermore. Amen.

We praise, we worship Thee, we trust,
And give Thee thanks forever,
O Father, that Thy rule is just
And wise and changes never;
Thy boundless power o'er all things reigns,
Done is whate'er Thy will ordains;
Well for us that Thou rulest!

The powers ordained by Thee
With heavenly wisdom bless;
May they Thy servants be
And rule in righteousness!
O Lord, stretch forth Thy mighty hand
And guard and bless our native land!

72. Religious Liberty.

O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; because His mercy endureth forever. *Ps. 118, 1.*

Luther stood for freedom of conscience and thereby also widened the area of liberty in general. That his principles are the fundamental principles of our American Republic there can be no question. He asserted the equality of all men before God, in Christ, and out of that at length came our Declaration of Independence, which affirms the equality of all men before human law. Our Constitution still reads: "Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof."

Religious liberty, this blessed fruit of the Lutheran Reformation, is the greatest spiritual blessing of our land. Our Government does not take upon itself to prescribe what religion its citizens must adopt, nor does it in any other way transgress the bounds of the Church. We have here, indeed, such a relation between the two as God desires it. We may worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience.

Let us guard the priceless heritage that has been bequeathed to us. Let us guard our freedom of conscience, our religious liberty. The wise and pious framers of our Constitution, knowing both from reason and from unpleasant experience that religious liberty can exist only in the case of strict separation of Church and State, adopted every precaution to prevent the admission of anything hostile to religious liberty being incorporated into the constitutions of States. Their object was to have a free Church in a free country.

It is well known that a spirit prevails which is intensely hostile to the civil and religious principles of our Government. There have been some bold encroachments on the part of Rome, which does not believe in the separation of Church and State. Rome acknowledges but one head, who wields temporal, political, and spiritual power. Rome openly and boldly seeks to obtain temporal and political power throughout our country. Let us beware of Rome's destructive power in our country!

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, owing to Thy paternal care Thy Church has been preserved from false doctrine and persecution on account of the true faith; our country was not devastated. We pray Thee, protect our homes from peril and grant health of body and peace within our borders. Crown our land with Thy goodness and give us the necessaries of life. Preserve Thy Church from errors in doctrine and life, our country from war, famine, and pestilence, our homes from fire and all danger, and the fruits of the field from hail and tempest. Above all, preserve unto us the precious jewel of religious liberty. Amen.

Our fathers' God, to Thee,
Author of liberty,
To Thee we sing;
Long may our land be bright
With freedom's holy light;
Protect us by Thy might,
Great God, our King!

73. The Duty of Loyal Citizens.

Render, therefore, to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honor, to whom honor. *Rom. 13, 7.*

Loyalty to country requires constant readiness to serve. It calls for true allegiance, for willingness to sacrifice our own comfort for the good of the nation. Loyalty may mean a hero's grave; but for every one called to die for his country a thousand are called to live for her. And living for her means obedience to her laws and support of every effort to make her laws better. It means resistance to every form of corruption. It means active effort to clear the national life of every obstacle to freedom of thought and conscience. The loyal man knows that in America all men are equal and that an attempt to make classes among us is an act of disloyalty. We can all have a better, a healthier, a happier, a more powerful America if we all stand and work together, all truly loyal to our flag.

Indeed, there is much necessity for such loyalty. We read that men stuff ballot-boxes, bribe judges and aldermen, buy legislatures, influence the Senate, and have even tried to assault the White House. All this strikes at the liberty guaranteed us by our Constitution. The excesses of strikers, the grasping greed of soulless corporations and trusts, with their iron heel on the poor,— this, too, has its vital germ in disloyalty.

Is there no remedy to heal the diseases and sores from which the body politic is now suffering so acutely? These ailments cannot be cured by human ointments. Salvation for the nation can be expected only if into the minds and hearts of the rising generation are instilled the pure and simple principles of a true Bible Christianity. If we would help the State, we must begin with the family. But there is no other means of reforming the family than the Christian religion; when people once embrace that, then we may hope for improvement. It is the prime duty of loyal citizens to make their children citizens of the kingdom of God, to lead them to Jesus.

Prayer.

O Lord God, I beseech Thee to grant me grace not to take a dislike to my position of dependence wherein Thou hast, according to Thy will and pleasure, placed me in this world. May I never become impatient and murmur against Thee because of it nor envy other people their superior station, but ever gladly and with my whole heart conform to this Thy will and walk as serving Thee, my God, in heaven, and not man. For Thy sake let me be loyal to the civil government, rendering to all members of it their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom, to whom custom; fear, to whom fear; honor, to whom honor. Amen.

Let me be slow to urge my will,
Prompt to obey;
Help me to mortify my flesh,
Work, serve, and pray.

74. The Christians Are the Pillars of a Nation.

We know that all things work together for good to them that love God. *Rom. 8, 28.*

True Christians honor the magistrates and hold them in love and esteem. We honor them even in our public services by mentioning them in our general prayer every Sunday.

The Christians, furthermore, conform to the laws and never take part in a revolt. They also scrupulously pay the taxes imposed upon them and do their part as citizens to promote the general welfare of the State. They seek the peace of the nation. They spread the glad tidings of the Gospel of Christ, who is the Fountain of great blessings. Above all, they endeavor to bring up their children as pious, God-fearing men and women, who, whenever their country's call places them into public offices, will render a conscientious performance of their duties and an honest administration of public affairs. For is it not true that that State and that city is best provided for whose citizens are actuated by Christian principles? Government has in Christians the best support as regards true morality, for they are the very sap and marrow of all true moral influence. Moreover, by their good example, Christians prompt the children of this world to display more natural uprightness and faithfulness in the performance of those things which their government demands of them.

The Christians are indeed the cause of all divine blessings showered upon a nation. If they do what is right, they can bring about so much, that the nation throughout which they are, as it were, strewed as salt does not become corrupt or ruined. The Christians are the pillars of a nation. They are the props and foundation of the state. They are the dam which keeps back the water of divine wrath. Take, for example, the citizens of Sodom. God agreed not to destroy the place if ten righteous people were found in it. The large city of Nineveh was spared by God because its inhabitants repented upon hearing Jonah. Whenever, therefore, a nation has been severely punished on account of its sins, it was because it lacked true Christians who stayed the punishing hand of God.

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we thank Thee that through the agency of parents and masters Thou dost even now, toward the evening of the world, maintain government, order, and peace on earth, and we beseech Thee graciously to guide and govern these Thy representatives that they may walk in Thy ways and wisely and properly fulfil the duties incumbent upon them for the welfare of all citizens. Teach us to honor those in authority, Thy ministers to us for good, and enable us by Thy Holy Spirit to submit ourselves to every lawful ordinance of men for Thy sake. Amen.

The best gifts from on high
In rich abundance pour
That we may magnify
And praise Thee more and more.
O Lord, stretch forth Thy mighty hand
And guard and bless our fatherland.

75. The Special Promise of the Fourth Commandment.

Honor thy father and mother; which is the first commandment with promise, that it may be well with thee and thou mayest live long on the earth. *Eph. 6, 2. 3.*

To make the path of duty over against parents and superiors easy and pleasant, God adds a promise, saying: "that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord, thy God, giveth thee." We see that according to the exact wording this promise was given to the Jews and therefore was only a temporary promise. But its meaning and application appertains to all men of all times, and therefore this promise is changed in the New Testament; it now reads: "that it may be well with thee and thou mayest live long on the earth." This promise of God ought indeed to encourage us and give us hearts that will melt with pleasure and love toward those whom we should honor according to the Fourth Commandment.

He who despises this gracious promise of God and does not obey his parents deprives himself of a great blessing, and it surely will not be well with him in the end. Woe to him that heeds neither the divine command nor the divine promise! Disobedient and rebellious Absalom, hanging with his hair enmeshed in the boughs of an oak-tree, with Joab's three darts in his heart, is a warning example.

Let us strive, with God's help, to obey His Fourth Commandment, so that we shall receive the promise He has added to it.

Let us remember the words spoken by God, through Jeremiah, to the Rechabites, Jer. 35, 18. 19: "Because ye have obeyed the commandment of Jonadab, your father, and kept all his precepts and done according to all that he hath commanded you, therefore thus saith the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel, Jonadab, the son of Rechab, shall not want a man to stand before Me forever." Let us, then, keep our father's commandment and forsake not the law of our mother. Whatever we do to honor our parents shall be richly recompensed to us, so that we shall have not only bread, clothing, and money for a year or two, but long life, all that we need for this life, and peace, and, for Christ's sake, shall be eternally rich and blessed. For God has promised it, and God's promises will not fail us.

Prayer.

O Lord God, in the Fourth Commandment Thou hast so earnestly enjoined upon me to honor my father and my mother, and Thou hast also graciously promised to reward such service with long life and temporal well-being. I now pray Thee from my inmost soul, give unto me an obedient heart, that with due reverence I may obey my dear parents and all those placed over me in their stead, giving them honor in word and deed, with patience. May I never hurt their feelings or despise and mock them as long as I live, that Thy blessing may come upon me. Amen.

Now thank we all our God
With heart and hands and voices,
Who wondrous things hath done,
In whom His world rejoices;
Who from our mother's arms
Hath blessed us on our way
With countless gifts of love
And still is ours to-day.

76. The Fifth Commandment.

Whoso sheddeth man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed; for in the image of God made He man. *Gen. 9, 6.*

"Thou shalt not kill." What is meant by this divine commandment? In the first place, outright murder. We should do or say nothing whereby our neighbor's life may be destroyed. Life is a gift of God, the Source and Fountain of all life. He sustains it and determines its length and bounds. Every hour of man's life is supremely important when considered as the period of grace granted him; and to safeguard it, God has placed beside it, as a guardian, the Fifth Commandment: "Thou shalt not kill."

This commandment evidently does not apply to the execution of tried and convicted murderers on the part of the civil government. It furthermore does not apply to killing in self-defense, nor does it apply to soldiers who are fighting their government's enemy. But it does apply most emphatically to the authors of unjust wars. It also applies to lynchers, who take the law into their own hands. The most brutal form of murder is that of mothers killing their own unborn offspring, a crime very prevalent in our day. And thousands of human lives are lost through lack of sufficient precaution.

Life is God's choicest temporal gift, and one is not at liberty to take it before God's appointed time. We are not to hurt or harm ourselves in our body. And yet, appalling is the increase of suicides!

These cases do not, however, by any means exhaust this commandment, the import of which is, as Luther explains, "that we may not hurt nor harm our neighbor in his body." Our neighbor's life should be so sacred to us that we would not in any way impair it. We should do or say nothing whereby his life may be shortened or embittered. This commandment also condemns the look of hatred and the insulting word, which grieves the soul and tends to shorten life. "Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders." "Whoso hateth his brother is a murderer." This is the root of the evil.

Prayer.

O God and Lord of all, Thou Lover of life, we thank Thee that Thou hast safeguarded the life of man by the commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." We confess, however, that we have often with set purpose or from negligence, in deed, word, and thought, transgressed Thy Law. We beseech Thee, blot out all our sins with the innocent blood of Christ and cleanse our hearts from envy, hatred, and every thought and feeling kin to him who is a murderer from the beginning. Amen.

Let my life and conversation
Be directed by Thy Word;
Lord, Thy constant preservation
To Thine erring child afford.
Nowhere but alone in Thee
From all harm can I be free.

77. Beware of Sinful Anger!

Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the Judgment. *Matt. 5, 22.*

Sinful anger in the heart is just as punishable before God as outright murder before men. Therefore beware of sinful anger!

We say "sinful" anger; for there is an anger which is not sinful. There is a cause for anger when it is directed against sin. Moses was angry when he found the children of Israel worshiping the golden calf, and so angry was he that he smote the two tables of stone against the rocks, reducing the tables to fragments. Jesus was angry when in the Temple He found the venders and money-changers who had turned the house of prayer into a den of thieves. Christ looked upon such conduct of the Jews with indignation. Anger filled His breast, and woes rolled over His lips against the hypocrisy of the Pharisees. But there is an anger which is sinful, and such is the anger of which Jesus says: "Whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the Judgment." There is always danger in anger, even when it is right and just. If nourished and persisted in, it easily leads to rash words, which would better not have been spoken, and to deeds for which we afterwards feel sorry.

Be slow to wrath. Let not the sun go down upon your wrath. Banish from your heart those thoughts of hatred which come to you. Let them disappear with the setting sun. Control yourself. Let not your anger get away with you. We may have all the cause in the world to get angry, but if we are the children of our heavenly Father, we shall receive power from on high to control ourselves, to subdue our passions, and not to forget ourselves and say and do things which should not be said and done because they are sinful. Sinful anger, which is the opposite of love, has none but evil wishes for the person against whom it is directed. When, by the grace of God, we realize that this commandment utterly condemns us, let us take our refuge to the boundless love of Him who has died for us and atoned for all our sins.

Prayer.

O Lord, my faithful God and Father, hear my prayer that I may be and remain Thy child and temple now and forever. Let me not fall into error and vices, which war against my conscience.

Keep my heart from sinful anger and hatred. Preserve me from blood-guilt and from all ills. Amen.

Jesus, my Savior, let me be
More perfectly conformed to Thee;
Implant each grace, each sin dethrone
And form my temper like Thine own.

Let the envenomed heart and tongue,
The hand outstretched to do me wrong,
Excite no feelings in my breast
But such as Jesus once expressed.

To others let me always give
What I from others would receive;
Good deeds for evil ones return,
Nor, when provoked, with anger burn.

78. We Should Help and Befriend Our Neighbor in Every Bodily Need.

Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy. *Matt. 5, 7.*

The Word of God calls woe upon those who give offense to others, causing them to sin and harming their spiritual life. But it also makes us responsible for the soul of our neighbor. If his soul is endangered and we do nothing to help him, we become the murderers of his soul. It is our sacred duty to take a sympathizing interest in our neighbor's woe, even though nothing appeals to us but his mute misery, his helplessness, his want. To convict us of gross negligence in the eyes of God, nothing is necessary but that we fail to help some poor Lazarus lying at our door, although we have the means to help him. God takes note of this and says: "Whoso hath this world's good and seeth his brother have need and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him?" 1 John 3, 17. Again, Is. 58, 7: "Is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry and that thou bring the poor that are cast out to thy house? when thou seest the naked, that thou cover him and that thou hide not Thyself from thine own flesh?"

Those in bodily need we have always with us, the poor, the sick, the afflicted. The needy may be wholly or in part themselves to blame for their distress; they may, moreover, have treated us basely, laughed and scoffed at us, slandered us, and injured us in many ways. Nevertheless it is the will of God that we should help them. To be sure, none of us has done his whole duty in this respect. Unless mercy prevails over justice, none of us will be saved. But let us not use this as a passport wilfully to pass by the poor and needy. It is truly blessed to give to those in need. To those who do so the Lord will say on the Last Day: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye have done it unto Me." Oh, then, let us be merciful toward our neighbor!

Prayer.

O God and Lord of all, grant that we may not in any way devise or do injury to ourselves or our neighbor, but by Thy Holy Spirit fill our hearts with true love of Thee and all men that we may seek to preserve what Thy hand has made and help our neighbor in his every need, help the needy with our gifts, but above all give them our sympathy, our love, which inspires even the most helpless and hopeless with new cheer and courage. Let us so live in this world that men may see our good works and glorify Thee, our Father in heaven, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Abide, O faithful Savior,
Among us with Thy love;
Grant steadfastness and help us
To reach our home above.

79. The Sixth Commandment.

Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications. ***Matt. 15, 19.***

Thou shalt not commit adultery. According to Luther this means: We should so fear and love God that we live chaste and pure in word and deed, each one loving and honoring his spouse. God says "Thou" and thereby addresses Himself to everybody without exception, to man and woman, married and unmarried, and demands absolute chastity in deed, word, look, and thought; and He forbids each and every kind of impurity.

In what great honor God holds marriage may be seen from the fact that in Ps. 45 He pictures the union of Himself and the Church under the family relation; in Isaiah He says to the Church: "Thy Maker is thy Husband," and in Ephesians, chapter 5, having spoken of husband and wife, the apostle says: "But I speak concerning Christ and the Church."

To emphasize and safeguard the holy estate of matrimony, the Sixth Commandment was given, which forbids everything by which the divine ordinance of matrimony is broken, violated, or discredited, be it in or out of wedlock, by deed, word, or desire. This commandment hallows the prerogatives of matrimony, without which there would be no family ties, no well-ordered state, no rightly constituted society. Although not a sacrament, marriage is nevertheless to be held sacred by all. "Marriage is honorable in all," we read in Heb. 13, 4.

Let us, therefore, approach the subject of matrimony with due reverence. And because we no longer wear the image of God as our wedding-garment, it behooves us all the more to heed well the commandment by which God impresses upon us the sanctity of marriage. The worldling sniffs when Christians speak of "holy" wedlock. Thereby the world lays bare its shallow vulgarity and bestial way of looking at things solemn and sacred. We regard wedlock as holy, as a sweet flower from Paradise, as a token of God's bounteous grace and goodness.

Prayer.

O holy and righteous God, who art pure and didst create us pure and desirest us to be holy and free from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit: we confess unto Thee that our hearts are filled with fleshly desires and that we have often in thought, word, and deed sinned against Thy pure and holy Law. Cleanse us, therefore, we beseech Thee, with the blood of the Lamb and renew a right spirit within us. Grant Thy grace to all spouses that, in obedience to Thee and in love to each other, they may together keep the bond of matrimony holy and unbroken. Amen.

Art thou the house of God, then bear
Within thy breast all purity,
That God may come and, dwelling there,
May every joy and sorrow share
In time and all eternity.

80. Holy Wedlock is a Lifelong Union.

What, therefore, God hath joined together, let not man put asunder. *Matt. 19, 6.*

The marital bond is a lifelong union of man and wife unto one flesh. God wants to have His creation and ordinance preserved intact and inviolate. Marriage is indissoluble. God says of man and wife: "They are no more twain, but one flesh"; and again: "Whosoever shall put away his wife and marry another committeth adultery; and whosoever marrieth her that is put away committeth adultery." Only one exception does Christ give to the rule, Matt. 5, 32: "Whosoever shall put away his wife, saving for the cause of fornication." Fornication means unfaithfulness of one spouse to the other in the marriage relation. Illicit intercourse with another is given as a just cause for severance of the marriage tie. As for other causes, the Bible recognizes not one. And even in cases of fornication it does not *demand* a divorce. But since the guilty party in such a case has already broken the marital bond, the innocent party does not on his or her part break it in obtaining a divorce, or legal acknowledgment of the actual nonexistence of the bond of marriage.

This is the position of Scripture and of our Lutheran Church. This is the practise of her clergy. Divorcing one's spouse for any other reason than the one stated is adultery, and therefore forbidden by God's "Thou shalt not" as a sinful and godless act.

Therefore, ye husbands and wives who live in unhappy wedlock, consider this well: the man is to be man and stay man, who in love cares for his wife, and is to be a model in life. The wife should be and stay wife and not pretend to be man, which, according to God's wise plan, she is not; she shall love her husband truly and sincerely and make life as sweet as possible for him. When misfortune and sufferings come upon one or the other, then each has the duty to abide with the other and not to desert another. "Where you stay, there I will stay; nothing but death shall separate us."

Prayer.

O gracious God, heavenly Father, to Thee I render thanks from my inmost heart for granting me a safe and honorable life in a loving family. It is due to Thy fatherly care that I have been preserved from all harm of body and soul and have received many and great blessings. For all this I owe thanks to Thy fatherly love, care, and almighty protection, and I heartily pray Thee that Thou wouldst further graciously extend to me and my family Thine almighty protection and sustain body and soul by Thy power unto life eternal, for Christ Jesus' sake. Amen.

O may this bounteous God
Through all our life be near us,
With ever joyful hearts
And blessed peace to cheer us;
And keep us in His grace
And guide us when perplexed
And free us from all ills
In this world and the next.

81. The Matrimonial Estate was Instituted by God Himself.

And the Lord God said, It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him. *Gen. 2, 18.*

God Himself, even before the Fall in Paradise, instituted the estate of matrimony. When He had created Adam, He saw that it was not good for him to be alone, and He created a help meet for him. He formed Eve out of a rib of Adam, brought her to him, and then performed the first marriage ceremony. Thus marriage is a divine institution. When Adam, the son of God, and Eve, the first woman, both created in the image of God, clasped their hands in purest affection, the great God Himself pronounced the benediction and gave them as their wedding-gift the dominion over the beasts of the earth, the birds of the air, and the fish of the sea. But, alas! man fell into sin and dragged all creation with him into ruin.

Yet even after the deplorable fall of man, God does not disown His creation and ordinance, but esteems it highly. Nothing could be more significant than that, when the Savior came to redeem the fallen world and entered upon His atoning work, His first work should be wrought in honor of the estate of holy matrimony. He was present at a marriage-feast and on that occasion changed water into wine and manifested forth His divine glory. By His presence and by that miracle He clearly endorsed, sanctioned, and placed His divine approbation upon matrimony, as He once did in the lovely Garden of Eden.

We should therefore never forget the sacred character of matrimony. No one should enter it lightly, but each one who contemplates marriage ought to take this important step in the fear of God and in full conformity with the divine Law. Couples doing this will later have comfort in times of affliction. Those who have entered holy matrimony lightly, unadvisedly, against their parents' consent, and not in conformity with the divine Law will find no comfort, no consolation, in such days. Let us therefore honor God's holy institution.

Prayer.

Almighty, beneficent God, Thou hast Thyself instituted holy wedlock, and by means of the first miracle of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ didst honor and distinguish it as an estate pleasing to Thee, in which also many sainted fathers and prophets lived a godly life, well-pleasing to Thee. Prevent the Evil One from sowing discord and contention, and if, through weakness of the flesh, the spirit of discord gets the upper hand, grant that harmony between husband and wife be speedily restored. Preserve from harm my house and my home and all Thou hast given me. Amen.

Jesus, Savior, pilot me
Over life's tempestuous sea;
Unknown waves before me roll,
Hiding rocks and treach'rous shoal;
Chart and compass came from Thee —
Jesus, Savior, pilot me.

82. A Rightful Betrothal Must Not be Broken.

Jacob served seven years for Rachel and . . . said unto Laban, Give me my wife. *Gen. 29, 20. 21.*

Two things make a rightful betrothal: the free will of the contracting parties and the consent of their parents.

Such rightful betrothal must not be broken. Why? Because holy wedlock begins with such promise. The matrimonial estate is entered into by rightful betrothal. When you open the Bible, you find it written on the first page of the New Testament that Mary was espoused, or promised, to Joseph. But in the very next verse, in verse 19, you will see that the Holy Ghost calls Joseph Mary's *husband,* although he was only engaged, or promised, to her. And the angel of the Lord, in verse 20, calls Mary Joseph's *wife,* although she was only promised, or betrothed. And in verse 24 the Holy Ghost again calls the Virgin Mary Joseph's *wife.* Thus the Holy Ghost has shown that a rightful betrothal is as binding as wedlock itself, yea, that the marriage is entered into by this mutual plighting of troth.

Already Jacob knew this. When he was ready to celebrate his wedding with Rachel, his bride, he said to her father Laban: "Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled, that I may go in unto her." Deut. 22, 23. 24 a virgin who was only promised, or betrothed, to a man is called his *wife,* and if another committed fornication with her, it was punished as adultery; or in other words, the punishment was the same as if she had been a married woman. Thus also in the prophet Hosea, chapter 4, 13, brides guilty of whoredom are called spouses committing adultery.

From all this we see that engaged people are to be regarded as married people; for the promise and consent really make matrimony. This is the doctrine of the Lutheran Church, and it accords with Scripture. Act, therefore, in the fear of God when becoming betrothed; when lawfully engaged, beware of breaking faith!

Prayer.

O Thou immaculate and holy God, who didst institute holy wedlock, grant that I may not make members of fornication out of the members of my body, but at all times consider that my body is a member of Jesus Christ, my Savior. But rather let me ever, in ardent devotion and with a fervent longing for heaven, be zealously intent upon living in such a manner that my body may be a temple of God the Holy Ghost, never ceasing to love Jesus, who was crucified and given into death for me. Let me not go astray on the slippery paths of sin, but adhere to Thee and do Thy holy will. Amen.

How shall the young secure their hearts
And guard their lives from sin?
Thy Word the choicest rules imparts
To keep the conscience clean.

83. The Home of a Truly Christian Married Couple.

Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. *1 Tim. 4, 8.*

If marriage is a divine institution, well-pleasing unto God, why is it that married people often are unhappy? The reason is not to be sought in marriage, but in the motives which often prompt some people to take this step. Some do not marry for love, but only for pleasure and lust; and when the fire of passion dies out, the ashes remain. Others marry for money, and they reap thistles and thorns. Still others marry for selfish reasons, and they are generally disappointed. Wedlock is a holy estate, and therefore people are not to come together as do brutes, merely to satisfy their fleshly lust, nor for selfish reasons, but as doing God service, and with this end in view they are to live. "Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence and likewise also the wife unto the husband. Husbands, love your wives."

The family is the one place above all others where the tender plant of love is to be cherished; and its beautiful blossoms, sweet little children, strengthen the affections between husband and wife. Is there any one that can imagine happier people than a believing couple of loving parents with their children? And should they not be exceedingly happy if in true Christian faith they believe in Jesus, their blessed Savior, and through faith in Him are able to call the bountiful Father in heaven their own?

At the wedding in Cana of Galilee, Jesus consecrated and hallowed the new home which was established there by revealing to His friends and disciples His glory in a magnificent manner. These two people certainly founded a truly happy home. They invited Jesus and had Him as their honored Guest. Upon their house rested the Lord's blessing. Unhappy are those who have not Jesus with them, who do not believe in Him and refuse to admit Him to their home. Such a married couple may apparently be ever so happy, they may be ever so healthy and wealthy, — they are, after all, poor, miserable, and unhappy.

Prayer.

O Lord God, into Thine almighty hand we commit ourselves and all those who live in holy wedlock and all their children and domestics; preserve us and them all, we pray Thee, from sin, shame, and all ills. Let our lives be so full of faith and rich in the good works of faith that Thy dear Son, our Lord and Savior, will also enter our home, be our daily Guest, and bless us. Grant to us, Thy humble servants, to be diligent in our calling, to eat our bread in the sweat of our brow, and not to grow disheartened when we feel the burden of hard labor; for Thou hast so ordained it. Also bestow Thy blessing upon our substance that it may increase without damage or loss to others. This we ask in the name of Jesus. Amen.

O blest the house, whate'er befall,
Where Jesus Christ is all in all;
Yea, if He were not dwelling there,
How poor and dark and void it were!

84. Marriage was Instituted for the Propagation of the Human Race.

And God blessed them; and God said unto them, Be fruitful and multiply and replenish the earth and subdue it. *Gen. 1, 28.*

In the Fifth Commandment we have learned that God regards human life as holy and throws around it His protecting commandment, "Thou shalt not kill." The Sixth Commandment stands in close relation to the fifth; for holy wedlock is the God-appointed means of continuing human life in an orderly and decent way. It is at once the basis and bond of society.

At the beginning of the human race, God spoke these solemn words: "Be fruitful and multiply." What a terrible indictment of those who abuse the creation and ordinance of God by preventing the birth of children or killing them after conception! Nations have been brought to ruin by this appalling vice, and if the physicians speak the truth, it is the crowning sin of our age and country. Where are the families blessed with many children? Why is it that the number of births is decreasing? Here the evil lies hidden. This crime has wrought a frightful havoc in many countries. The family life is the foundation of human society. Married life, without seeking to fulfil its first purpose, the perpetuation of the human race and the bringing up of one's offspring in the proper manner, undermines and frustrates that foundation of the state and must be called one of the blackest of evils.

The family is the first purpose of matrimony. But some deliberately resolve that there shall be no family, or, at least, that it shall be as small, as limited, as possible. There is no other means of making people shun this hidden sin than the Word of God. For instance, Ps. 127, 3: "Lo, children are a heritage of the Lord, and the fruit of the womb is His reward." Only truly Christian parents will take upon themselves the great task of bringing up children. The command and promise of God will move them to do it.

Prayer.

O benignant God and faithful Father, give grace unto me that I may constantly keep Thy fear before mine eyes, also love Thee and trust in Thee, my Creator and Redeemer, above all things, but that I also may honor and love my spouse and not covet any other. Fill my heart and soul with a holy purpose to lead a chaste life, in fear and humility, so that I may prevent or allay any wrath or ill humor, ever living in gentleness and forbearance, in a mild spirit, to Thy praise and glory. Amen.

O grant that no vain thought may rest
Or be conceived within my breast;
That by each deed and word and thought
All glory may to God be brought.
But what are wishes! Lord, mine eye
On Thee is fixed, to Thee I cry!
Wash, Lord, and purify my heart
And make it clean in every part;
And when 'tis clean, Lord, keep it true,
For that is more than I can do.

85. We Should Lead a Chaste and Decent Life.

Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God. *Matt. 5, 8.*

Our time is fast losing its sensitiveness to the strict demands of purity. Young and old are given to filthy jesting, levity, and lust. The close association of sexes in modern life has in large part removed the veil of female modesty and shaken the foundations of chastity. Recreations which excite the sex impulse into action are openly defended, and indulged in, without compunction.

How shall the young under such conditions secure their hearts and retain their innocency? The inner and impregnable line of their defense must be the fear of God. "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection," says Paul. "Abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul," the meaning of which is: The evil desires hurt the soul by hushing prayer and strangling the spiritual life within a Christian. Thus sin, left to itself, works death. Therefore God voices His will in words of fire and thunder on stony tables, saying: "Thou shalt not commit adultery," which means that we are to lead a chaste and decent life in word and deed and that we are to curb, guard, and control the sinful desires of our flesh.

Recall to mind the example of Joseph in Potiphar's house. Carried away by an evil impulse, the captain's wife eagerly besought him to gratify her impure passion. Now, Joseph was not a perfect saint, but his heart was just as sinful as ours. And he lived in circumstances which made it difficult for him to remain pure, but easy to sin. Yet he was instantly conscious that God was everywhere and would surely see the evil deed and be much grieved by it. "How then can I do this great wickedness and sin against God?" was his answer. Joseph knew the will of God, and would accept no other standard of right and wrong. Faith and childlike fear of God and willingness to obey His Word gave him power to overcome the world, to quench the evil desires of his sinful heart, and to gain the victory over sin. It is God who gives strength to the weak. He does it through the means of His Word and Sacrament.

Prayer.

O Thou holy and merciful God, heavenly Father, graciously grant, I pray Thee, that I may begin a new, a truly Christian life, pleasing to Thee and to all the angels in heaven. For the coming days I commit myself to Thy gracious protection that I may not only rest and sleep in safety and rise refreshed and in good health, but also be intent on furthering Thy honor. Let me endure in my faith. O Lord, of myself I cannot remain steadfast; if I lose courage to fight, if I lay down my arms, the battle is lost. Give me strength to endure unto the end and be saved. Lord Jesus, I am Thine, and Thou art mine; my soul yearneth to be with Thee. Amen.

Plenteous grace with Thee is found,
Grace to cover all my sin;
Let the healing streams abound,
Make and keep me pure within.

86. How to Test Amusements.

Whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. *Phil. 4, 8.*

"Rejoice, O young man, in thy youth." These are the words of aged King Solomon. They contain an admonition for young people to enjoy the splendid time of their youth. For how many understand how to make the very best of their youth? It is God's will that young people rejoice in the days of their youth. Those clear, bright eyes that God has given to young people are to sparkle with happiness and joy.

"But know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into Judgment." Does this addition of aged Solomon seem cruel to you, that for all our amusements God will bring us into Judgment? Why? Let us see. Take, for instance, the modern theater. What is it? It is largely given up to wretched, sensational plays. Scenes exhibiting grossest indecency and impurity are enacted there, suggestive of all imaginable uncleanness. You know that every theater is more or less given up to plays whose atmosphere is tainted and vicious, plays to which no modest man should take a modest woman, plays which are an assault upon all that the family circle holds most holy and sacred. Or take the modern dance. The sensuality of the modern dance makes bold-eyed women of soft-eyed maidens; it makes swaggering rakes of pure lads; it changes love to flirting and to a game of flippant shrewdness. Women of virtue and self-respect will blush to have the dance named to them. Strange that young ladies will allow gentlemen to assume positions and take liberties in the public dance that would not be allowed in their parlors. "But know thou that for all these things God will bring thee into Judgment!"

How should you, then, test amusements? Ask if they draw you nearer to Christ or remove you farther from Him; if they increase or diminish respect for Christian manhood and womanhood; if they increase or lessen love for virtue and purity; if they make resistance to temptation easier or harder; and if they redound to the glory of God.

Prayer.

O heavenly Father, three mighty enemies I find assailing me: the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life; these endeavor to draw me from Thy grace. Therefore I pray Thee, O my Father, create and preserve in me a clean heart. Grant that I carefully shun all places which lend occasion for uncleanness and may always be restrained by Thy fear. O God, just and holy, who triest both heart and reins, grant that I may so adhere to Thee in this world that in the world to come I may not be separated from Thee. Amen.

Thou art the Way, the Truth, the Life:
Grant us that way to know,
That truth to keep, that life to win
Whose joys eternal flow.

87. The Seventh Commandment.

That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter, because that the Lord is the Avenger of all such. *1 Thess. 4, 6.*

The Fifth Commandment safeguards the existence of life, the sixth regulates the continuation of life, the seventh protects us in the enjoyment of the things which serve to sustain life. Especially this commandment reaches far into the daily lives of men. The world is full of thieves. Therefore this commandment uncovers and punishes many sins.

God commands that no one shall damage or injure his neighbor in his possessions. We should so fear and love God that we will not take our neighbor's money or property nor get it by false ware or dealing. To steal is nothing else than to get another's property wrongfully into our possession.

The love of money is the root of all evil. Many have sinned for a trifle. Many a merchant has bought a place in hell for selling false goods. To save a little money, for instance, in order to get half-rates for their children, parents will make a false statement as to their age. To cheat the Government out of part of the taxes they ought to pay, many do not mention all of their property or give its full value to the assessor. God says Lev. 19: "Ye shall do no unrighteousness in judgment, in meteyard, in weight, or in measure. Just balances, just weights, a just ephah, and a just hin shall ye have: I am the Lord, your God." The prophet Amos censures the merchants of his time for swallowing up the needy and making the poor of the land to fail; for falsifying the ephah, the three-peck measure, making it small when they sold and making the shekel great, that is, taking too much money for inferior goods.

Has the world grown better since those days? Do not our present-day business methods tally with those in vogue when Amos lived? What enormous thieves we have! Soon after each succeeding bankruptcy they start business again on a still grander scale. But they have their reward. God says: "Woe unto him that buildeth his house by unrighteousness and his chambers by wrong!" Oh, that every one who desires to be a Christian would repent in true faith if he has sinned in this respect and henceforth always remember this word of God: "Let him that stole, steal no more."

Prayer.

Almighty God and Lord, who art the Lord of all and the Giver of all good gifts and who hast entrusted to us our portion of earthly goods that we should use them for Thine honor, for our own welfare, and for the benefit of our neighbor, we beseech Thee, for Thy dear Son's sake forgive all the infidelities of our stewardship, our coveting of what is not our own, and all our unfair dealings with men. Grant us grace to work with quietness, diligence, and faithfulness and to eat our own bread. Amen.

Yea, Lord, 'twas Thy free bounty gave
My body, soul, and what I have
In this poor life of labor.
O grant that I may through Thy grace
Use all my powers to show Thy praise
And serve and help my neighbor.

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88. True Riches.

If riches increase, set not your heart upon them. *Ps. 62, 10.*

We live in an age and in a land of money-worship. Earthly riches are considered mountains that will last forever. Yet how many are to-day poor that formerly were wealthy! And when death comes, the rich man cannot take a cent along with him. Look at the rich man in the gospel who said to his soul: "Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry." But God said to him: "Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee; then whose shall those things be which thou hast provided?" "So is he," says our Savior, "that layeth up treasures for himself and is not rich toward God."

Is it, then, reprehensible in a man to be rich? By no means.

It is an honorable thing to have wealth as long as one has gotten it honestly. But because man is born flesh of the flesh and by nature is earthly-minded, the possession of riches is beset with great dangers to the soul, and therefore the Scriptures contain so many warnings against the temptation of riches. Paul says: "If ye be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." He writes to Timothy: "Charge them that are rich in this world that they be not high-minded nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God." Of a beloved companion he writes: "Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world." At many places the Scriptures plainly show that it is more difficult for the rich to be saved than for the poor.

And yet, although the possession of wealth is fraught with many and great temptations, it also brings many and great advantages. What glorious opportunities have the wealthy to become rich in good works! Blessed the rich who use their riches for works of charity! What they have done to the poor and needy they have done to the Lord.

Prayer.

O Lord, bless unto us Thy gifts that they may advance our health and well-being; but also grant that we do not misuse them to the injury of our soul and the multiplying of sins, such as intemperance and idleness, from which unchastity, adultery, cursing, swearing, murder, war, and all manner of ills come; but grant us grace that we may so use Thy gifts that their possession will not harm our soul and that our fellow-man may be benefited therewith, both his body and his soul. Amen.

Jesus, Thou art mine forever,
Dearer far than earth to me;
Neither life nor death shall sever
Those sweet ties which bind to Thee.

89. We Should Pray, Work, and Help Our Neighbor.

If any would not work, neither should he eat. *2 Thess. 3, 10.*

A faithful Christian, sorely distressed because he did not know how to support himself and his family during a time of business depression, did not know what to do. He was told by a good friend to do three things: first, to pray devoutly and fervently; secondly, to perform his daily labors conscientiously and diligently; thirdly, to be careful not to squander and waste. This kindled new courage in the poor Christian's heart; it taught him, first, to kneel down and pray: "Unto Thee I lift up mine eyes, O Thou that dwellest in the heavens." It also induced him to work. And it reminded him of the duty to "gather up the fragments that remain that nothing be lost." Then he was sure God would certainly provide sufficiently for him and his household, and not only that, but He would also give him enough to enable him to help his neighbor, to do good, to communicate to others.

So it is with all of us. To obtain God's blessing, we must work, and work diligently. There is no divine promise for the sluggard, for him who is too lazy to work. But remember, work alone is not enough. You must *pray* and work. Work without prayer is wasted, but the joining of both brings down upon the Christian blessings from God in abundance. Thus the 128th Psalm says: "Blessed is every one that feareth the Lord, that walketh in His ways. For thou shalt eat the labor of thine hands." The man who labors industriously in the fear of God has the promise that God will supply him what he needs for himself and his family; but the idler has no promise, save that poverty shall overtake him. And we can do glorious things with the results of our labor. We can execute deeds of love with them. We can make them serve Christ and extend His kingdom. We can convert them into a treasure preserved incorruptible for us in heaven. O blessed days of such a life! Not one of them is lost.

Prayer.

Bestow, O Lord, Thy grace that I may be found faithful in all things entrusted to me, not neglecting or wasting aught or causing any damage by negligence on my part. And may I never covet what is not mine or be dishonest in administering what has been placed in my charge. Preserve my health, strengthen my body, endow me with wisdom and understanding, that I may properly perform the work assigned me, that all things I do and perform may tend to Thy divine honor and to a blessed exercise of my faith. Amen.

Let me both diligently work
And lend my neighbor kindly help
    And duly pray.
Let me be kind in word and deed
    From day to day.

90. The Folly of Those who for Fear of Earthly Losses Will Not Follow Christ.

I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved. *1 Cor. 10, 33.*

One reason why so many in our day will not follow Christ is because they do not want to support the ministry and missions. This is a burden which they feel reluctant to bear, and they prefer to remain with the world, expecting to fare better with the children of the world than with the followers of Christ.

The folly of such is apparent. They are blind; they do not see their true profit. What is this profit? "That they may be saved," in other words: their soul's salvation. If they would follow Christ, He would feed their souls with the bread of eternal life, and He would also provide for their bodily needs. Behold how abundantly Jesus always provided for those who entrusted themselves to Him! He always furnishes those who believe in Him with food, though He should have to perform a miracle. David therefore says, Ps. 37: "I have been young and now am old; yet have I not seen the righteous forsaken nor his seed begging bread." What folly, then, not to follow Christ for fear that you might meet with earthly losses!

And do they not sear their conscience by withholding their dues from God? There is the clear command of God to all men under the sun: "Render unto God the things that are God's!" What are they doing by refusing to do this? They are stealing from God. Mal. 3, 8 we read: "Will a man rob God? Yet ye have robbed Me. But ye say, Wherein have we robbed Thee? In tithes and offerings." From this it is as clear as daylight that if one does not pay his church dues and does not do all he can for the spreading of God's kingdom, he robs God. What horrible sacrilege! Therefore the Lord says by the prophet in the next verse: "Ye are cursed with a curse, for ye have robbed Me." Owing to the fact that so many rob God, the Church of God is continually suffering, and the cause of the Cross is always languishing. Let us therefore never withhold our dues from the Church!

Prayer.

O Lord, Thou dost sit at the right hand of majesty in heaven to save us forever and to make us happy in Thy kingdom. Be Thou mindful of this even when we are not mindful of ourselves;

save us mightily by Thy power and give us heavenly bliss, not for our sakes, but for Thine own sake. For the kingdom we are to inherit is Thine; Thine is the power to lead us into it; and Thine shall forever be all honor and glory. O Lord, make our hearts willing to give, for Thou hast given to us. Amen.

Learn to give and learn to love;
Only thus thy life can be
Foretaste of the life above,
Tinged with immortality.

Give, for God to Thee hath given;
Love, for He by love is known;
Child of God and heir of heaven,
Let thy parentage be shown.

91. The Eighth Commandment.

A false witness shall not be unpunished, and he that speaketh lies shall not escape. *Prov. 19, 5.*

Besides body, wife or husband, and temporal possessions we have yet another treasure, namely, personal honor and good report, with which we cannot dispense. In order to protect our good name, God has given the Eighth Commandment: "Thou shalt not bear false witness against thy neighbor." What does this mean? "We should fear and love God that we may not deceitfully belie, betray, slander, nor defame our neighbor; but defend him, speak well of him, and put the best construction on everything." A good reputation is an asset we cannot afford to lose, for it is intolerable to live among men in open shame and general contempt. God does not want the reputation, character, and honor of our neighbor to be assailed and dragged into the mire.

The Eighth Commandment prohibits fastening guilt upon the innocent or clearing the guilty; it points a lesson particularly for courts of justice, where the poor, innocent man is often accused and traduced by false witness. God says that a false witness shall not be unpunished, but that he shall perish. A false witness is the accused if he denies a truthful charge. A false witness is an attorney who defends an unjust cause and prosecutes an innocent man. A false witness is a judge who condemns the just and justifies the wicked. Prov. 17, 15.

It is not in court only, however, that false witness is forbidden. The divine prohibition is directed also against the many sins of the tongue. "The tongue is a little member and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth!" Jas. 3, 5. It is related of Peter the Great that whenever any one spoke evil of another in his presence, he would interrupt him and say, "Well, now, has he not a bright side? Come, tell me some of his excellent traits which you have noticed. It is easy to splash mud, but I would rather help a man to keep his coat clean." Do not associate with those who are continually doing and saying evil things.

Prayer.

O almighty God, faithful Father, who besides our other faculties hast given us the power of speech to the end that we should therewith praise Thy name and serve men, we beseech Thee for Thy dear Son's sake, who did no sin and in whose mouth no guile was found, remember not against us the manifold misuse of our tongue in violation of truth and brotherly love, but direct our hearts so to fear Thee and to love our fellow-men that we bridle our tongue and not deceitfully and uncharitably belie, betray, slander, or defame our neighbor. Let us bear in mind that on Judgment Day we must render account of every idle word. Grant us grace ever more to fight against the sins of the tongue. Amen.

Just as I am and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

92. The Sin of Lying.

Wherefore, putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbor; for we are members one of another. *Eph. 4, 25.*

A lie is a falsehood spread with the express intention to deceive. The false, lying tongue delights in the publication of false or reproving charges or in the denial and suppression of truth. Falsehood and truth can never mix. A lie, though apparently serviceable at times to avoid a loss or gain a present advantage, is always an abomination to God; and of all lies those are most despicable which aim to harm others by wilful misrepresentation of facts.

Falsehood, whether it be a miserable little lie which disturbs a neighborhood for a day, or one of those larger frauds which for a time fills the world, is sure to recoil on the head of the liar. "He that speaks lies shall not escape." In the Book of Revelation there is a list of those who shall be cast into a lake of fire, and the liar is among them.

Unbelieving and godless people generally lie whenever and wherever they find it convenient and to their advantage to do so. But should not a Christian abhor and hate all lying and dishonesty? Is not the devil, whose works he has renounced in Baptism, the father of lies? Should he not therefore shrink from lying as from an ugly serpent? Should not God's command be continually before him? Should he not fear and love God so as not deceitfully to belie his neighbor? We Christians should therefore practise strictest uprightness in all our dealings with our fellow-men. Not only should we shun all manifest falsehood, but also guard against trickery and deceitfulness. Christians are followers of Him who is the Truth. Let us always abide by the truth, then, and speak the truth and thus prove that we are true followers of our Master, who said: "Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice." It is not always easy to tell the truth, but it is always right and God-pleasing to do so.

Prayer.

Come, O Holy Spirit, and enkindle us with the fire of Thy benign fervor, burn out all internal vileness, together with all falsehood, lying, and deceitfulness. And in order that we may serve our God with true earnestness and zeal, in fervency of faith and spirit, illumine us with the light of Thy truth. Thou hast said in Holy Writ: "Keep thy tongue from evil and thy lips from speaking guile." All use of the tongue to the injury or offense of our neighbor Thou hast forbidden. Grant us grace to obey Thee. Amen.

O let me never speak
What bounds of truth exceedeth;
Grant that no idle word
From out my mouth proceedeth;
And grant when in my place
I must and ought to speak,
My words due power and grace,
Nor let me wound the weak.

93. A Christian Should Not Go to Law with His Brother.

Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust and not before the saints? *1 Cor. 6, 1.*

May a Christian make use of the civil courts in his own behalf? May a congregation go to law? The Scripture-passage which comes into consideration here is 1 Cor. 6, 1—7: "Dare any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust and not before the saints? Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? And if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? Know ye not that we shall judge angels? How much more things that pertain to this life! If, then, ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the Church. I speak to your shame. Is it so that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren? But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers. Now, therefore, there is utterly a fault among you because ye go to law one with another." This passage, without any limitation, forbids a Christian to go to law with his brother.

If a Christian has aught against his brother, he should settle the difference in the congregation, by way of brotherly admonition, according to Matt. 18. Do you say, "Yes, we Christians can judge spiritual and eternal things, but not temporal things"? I say, "Much more those things which pertain to this life." For the temporal things are much less important than the eternal things. And Christians do have an aptitude to judge what is meet and right and according to Christian charity and brotherly love in temporal things. It, therefore, reflects the greatest shame upon Christians if they ask unbelievers and worldlings to judge their little temporal quarrels. But if a man who has wronged you is no longer a brother, then you may call upon the civil government for help against the offender, since it is instituted by God to protect its citizens against injury in order that they may lead a quiet and peaceable life.

Prayer.

Grant, O Lord God, that I may love my neighbor and show him deeds of kindness, love, and mercy with an honest heart. Thou art a God of peace, and it is Thy wish that all Christians should live peacefully and harmoniously. And even if they think they are right, they should rather *suffer* wrong than *do* wrong; they should rather relinquish their rights and live a peaceable life in all godliness and honesty than fuss and quarrel that Thou, O holy and faithful God, mayest be extolled and praised by us now and forevermore. Amen.

O let me be with all
In peace and friendship living,
As far as Christians may;
And if Thou aught art giving
Of wealth and honors fair,
O this refuse me not,
That naught be mingled there
Of goods unjustly got.

94. Judging and Condemning Others.

But the tongue can no man tame; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison. *Jas. 3, 8.*

An evil tongue is the devil's best servant; when it wags, he can, as it were, take it easy, for his work goes on apace without him; he presses the button, and the tongue does the rest. "The slanderer has the devil on the tongue," says Luther.

When we see our neighbor do something that we think wrong, how quick we are to judge him harshly! When some one complains of a neighbor, how quickly we condemn him before hearing him! But our Savior says: "Judge not, and ye shall not be judged; condemn not, and ye shall not be condemned." Luke 6, 37. People often try to defend themselves by saying, "I may say anything that is true." But what of it even if it be true? Who told you that it is your duty to make public what will harm your neighbor? It will do no one any good; therefore keep it to yourself. Go to your neighbor and tell him his fault and by speaking kindly to him, try to make him see the error of his way. There is the place and that is the time for you to talk; and this is also the manner in which you should go about it.

Many a one has a sharp and keen eye for the faults and follies of others; he observes their slightest mistakes, but his own gross faults and huge sins he does not perceive. Oh, how necesary therefore for every one to begin searching himself when any judging and condemning is to be done, to sweep away the filth from his own door before he does that service for some one else. The Book says: "Be ye therefore merciful as your Father also is merciful." Oh, how much must yet be changed in us if we really wish to imitate the exalted example of our kind heavenly Father! How often do we judge our neighbor harshly!

Yet, if we are merciful as our Father in heaven is merciful, we shall not delight to judge and condemn; but we shall forgive and forget. But this is not all. God goes to the root of the matter and says: "Let none of you *imagine* evil in your hearts against his neighbor."

Prayer.

Merciful and gracious God and heavenly Father, I render Thee heartfelt thanks and praise for having, during all the days of my life, taken such fatherly care of me and having up to this very hour graciously guarded me against all harm of body and soul. I pray Thee by that grace which Thou hast promised all penitent sinners that Thou wouldst cover and nevermore remember the sins that I have committed against Thee and my neighbor, both knowingly and unknowingly. If I but *think* evil in my heart against my neighbor I am already a sinner against Thy commandment. I therefore plead guilty before Thee, who searchest the heart; but I also appeal to Thy grace in Christ Jesus. Amen.

My soul, be on thy guard:
Ten thousand foes arise,
And hosts of sin are pressing hard
To draw thee from the skies.

95. We Should Defend Our Neighbor, Speak Well of Him, and Put the Best Construction on Everything.

Charity shall cover the multitude of sins. *1 Pet. 4, 8.*

He whose heart is filled with true love can easily cover the faults of his neighbor and speak well of him. For instance, if you had been overtaken in a fault and others would speak of it and condemn you for it, would you not like to have some one get up and speak a word in your favor? Or if some one were to accuse you of something of which you are innocent, would you not be thankful if some one would protect you against such false accusation? Now, this very same thing you should do for your neighbor. "Plead the cause of the poor and needy." Or, if some one would belittle you and speak to others of your faults and frailties, would you not be very much pleased if some one would praise your good deeds and qualities and speak well of you? Very well; this, then, is something that you ought to be willing to do for your neighbor. Or if you had spoken in a careless way, so that your words may be construed to have an evil meaning and a friend would stand up and explain that you did not mean to say such and such a thing, would not that be very agreeable to you? Then remember that you ought to be such a friend to your neighbor when others twist his words and misconstrue them.

This does not mean, however, that we should not speak of sins and shameful deeds that have been openly committed. If sins have become public, we certainly must speak of them publicly, and they must be judged and condemned publicly by those who are called to do so. But here in the Eighth Commandment secret sins and frailties of the neighbor are meant, such sins and frailties as are probably known only to you. In such a case we should charitably cover our neighbor's frailties and not make them known to others.

But shall we call black white? Shall we say that his sins are good deeds? O no! "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone," says Christ. "If a man be overtaken in a fault, ye, which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness." Gal. 6, 1. But do not tell others! Charity covers the neighbor's faults and sins of weakness.

Prayer.

Almighty God, faithful Father, enable us by Thy Holy Spirit above all to think well in our hearts of our neighbor and to defend him and speak well of him; indeed, in all things to use our tongue for the promotion of his bodily and spiritual welfare. May our tongue ever be an instrument of truth and love and seek Thy glory. Grant that we may learn to have compassion on all, to cover our neighbor's frailties and faults, to forgive sincerely, and that at all times and upon all occasions we may show the fruits of faith. Amen.

True charity feels sad
At cruel condemnation,
True charity is glad
Of truthful conversation.
It covers every fault,
In love it will not cease,
Enduring all assault
And seeking Christian peace.

96. The Ninth and Tenth Commandments.

Thou shalt not covet. *Rom. 13, 9.*

The last two commandments teach us that even the evil thought of the heart is truly a sin and, being a sin, already brings us into the judgment of God.

That even a thought may be sin, people do not know by nature. Therefore the commandment, "Thou shalt not covet," shows the spiritual nature and requirements of the Law. It condemns all self-righteous men, who view the divine Law superficially, as though it demanded no more than outward conformity to its precepts; it teaches us that in God's sight evil lust, the mere desire for something that He has forbidden, is indeed and truly sin, that therefore we should have no evil lust whatever in our hearts, but that only holy desires and love of God and of all that is good ought to dwell there.

But to make the matter very clear, God mentions as examples of what we should not covet our neighbor's house, wife, servants, and cattle. How do we know that we covet something? When we begrudge our neighbor something that he has, when, because we envy him his prosperity, we begin to dislike him, and when we desire to have "anything that is our neighbor's." If a Christian does not check these envious thoughts at the very beginning, they will drive him to deprive his neighbor of his advantages and gain them for himself; he will seek to appropriate them craftily and by a show of right. The world does not consider such methods wrong. But God does not want us to deprive our neighbor of anything that is his, even though in the eyes of the world we may be regarded as the rightful owners of what we have craftily taken from him.

The lust of gain is thus characterized by the Bible: "Take heed and beware of covetousness; for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Again: "How hard is it for them that trust in riches to enter into the kingdom of God!" Scripture warns us not to be evil affected by our riches. For "they that will be rich fall into temptation and a snare and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown man in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is the root of all evil." It is wrong to get rich at the expense of our neighbor.

Prayer.

O holy and righteous God, have mercy upon us for the sake of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ. Cleanse our hearts more and more from all covetousness and grant us grace to love our neighbor and to help him and to be of service to him in keeping what is his. Give us hearts that are content with such things as we have and let us not desire what Thou hast not intended for us. Fill our hearts with Thy Holy Spirit, so that all our desires may be centered in Thee, in Thy grace, and in Thy spiritual, heavenly treasures. Raise our thoughts and affections from earth to heaven. In Thy mercy I will ever trust. Amen.

If earthly cares and want oppress me
And cause me sorrow and regret
That things so vain can still distress me
And give me so much trouble yet, —
Though I am bowed down to the dust,
Still in His mercy I will trust.

97. Contentment Makes Truly Happy.

Godliness with contentment is great gain. *1 Tim. 6, 6.*

God's apostle commands: "Let your conversation be without covetousness and be content with such things as ye have." A man is content when he is satisfied with what God has apportioned to him, whether it be much or little, and when he is not continually craving things which God has not given him. Such contentment makes one truly happy. For such contented people cheerfully perform the labors and duties of the station and calling in which God has placed them and, without perplexing their minds, leave it to God to give the increase. They do not harass their minds with things of the past, which cannot be recalled or altered, or with things of the future, of which they know nothing, but, attending to the labors of the day, they leave past and future in the hand of God.

People who live so contented can nevertheless not enjoy perfect happiness, because in this vale of tears they remain surrounded by evils, but they live comparatively happy because they put up with evils and make the best of things that are not just as they would like to have them. Such contentment is indeed great gain.

How can a man acquire such contentment? It does not dwell in man by nature, neither can he acquire it by his own energy;

God must give it; it is His gift, and of Him we must ask it. But if we are to ask God for this gift, we must first be able to lift up our eyes to Him with cheerfulness and confidence. We must know that our sins are forgiven. No man on earth can have a truly contented and quiet heart unless he knows that he has forgiveness of all his sins, that God has become his gracious and loving Father, and that he shall not be brought into the judgment of condemnation. No man can possess the gift of true contentment unless he is a Christian; but the Christian does possess it. And that is great gain. He can say: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want."

Prayer.

O beneficent Father, let us not forget that all things we receive come from Thee and are Thine. For this very reason do Thou grant that we may never be dissatisfied with what Thou givest. We pray Thee to ward off from us whatever might render our livelihood difficult. Let each one be content and satisfied with his lot, that both rich and poor may recognize Thy power and may praise Thee. Grant that the rich do not place their trust in their wealth, that the poor enjoy the little they have in good health, and that we all may delight in Thy goodness. Amen.

I leave all things to God's direction,
He loveth me in weal and woe;
His will is good, true His affection,
With tender love His heart doth glow.
My Fortress and my Rock is He:
What pleaseth God, that pleaseth me.

98. The Whole Law Must be Kept by the Whole Man During His Whole Life.

If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. *1 John 1, 8.*

Many men lead outwardly harmless and moral lives, but they neglect and despise God's Word; their soul is full of the lust of the world. On the other hand, the creed of some is blameless while their life is offensive. But that is not as it should be; our faith and life should *both* be right. A man should not outwardly seem to be a temple of God and inwardly, and therefore in reality, a den of the devil.

God heartily hates a partial service. Hear the complaint of the Savior: "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth and honoreth Me with their lips; but their heart is far from Me."

Judging from the outward appearance of many people, one should think they were perfect; but on closer inspection one finds that they harbor and cherish a darling sin which they will not give up. If, for instance, you do not curse, cheat, and live a life of sexual impurity, if, however, you fail to worship God, despise the preaching of the Gospel, neglect the reading of your Bible, and do not do your share toward preparing ministers, sending out missionaries, you are a trespasser of the Law of God. If you offend in one point, you are guilty of all. If one string of a musical instrument is out of tune, the whole music is spoiled. Remember that the *whole* Law is to be kept by the *whole* man and during his *whole* life!

We must not put on our religion on Sunday and then put it off until the next Sunday. True, business is business, but that does not mean that you should break God's commandments. Obey them every day of the week and have Him in your daily labor as silent, but powerful partner. Likewise, do not put off serving God until you have reached old age. That is the height of folly; for it is a fact that by far the most people die young. Therefore, "remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth." Do not give the devil the flower of youth and to God the leaves of decayed old age. No, during your whole life delight in the Lord; He shall give thee the desire of thy heart.

Prayer.

O Thou merciful God and Father, though ofttimes, from weakness of the flesh or perversity of mind, I have forsaken Thee, ignored Thy commandments, and by many gross sins transgressed against Thee in heaven more than seventy times seven every day and also against my neighbor on earth, Thou didst not enter into judgment with me, nor didst Thou visit me with sudden, well-deserved punishment. O God the Holy Spirit, how shamefully have I spent my life, how sadly have I faltered, yea, committed grievous sins times without number! But Thou hast sought me, the lost sheep, so often and hast led me back to the right path; Thou hast sanctified, comforted, governed, and kept me in my calling. I humbly thank Thee for Thy unmerited grace, and I beseech Thee to bestow this same grace upon me in the future, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Lamb of God! I do implore Thee:
Guard, support me, lest I fall;
Let me evermore adore Thee,
Be my everlasting All.

99. Love Is the Sum of All Commandments.

Therefore love is the fulfilling of the Law. *Rom. 13, 10.*

Does God demand nothing more of us than that we lead an outwardly honest and decent life? Is He satisfied if we fulfil the outward letter of His Law, commit no gross offenses, and conduct ourselves in such a manner as not to give anybody a just cause to speak evil against us? Does He demand nothing more than such an outwardly good behavior? No; a man may be an angel on the surface, but be a devil at heart. God, however, is not deceived by man's outward conduct; He looks at the heart.

God demands love, and if man's works do not proceed from love, he has not kept the Law of his God; for "love is the fulfilling of the Law." God says: "My son, give Me thine heart and let thine eyes observe My ways." What God demands of us is our heart, that is, our love, our affection. By nature our hearts are void of the love of God. By nature we love everything but God. Our hearts must undergo a radical change. We must be born again. We must be made the children of God, and that is done by faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. If we have tasted of God's love to us in Christ, we shall say: Let us love Him because He first loved us. We will ask what God demands of us in order that we may observe His ways.

If the question arises, Is this or that action sinful? we ought to ask first of all whether there is some specific direction in God's Word concerning this particular thing of which we are inquiring. If there is nothing specifically said upon the question, we are then to ask whether it violates the love which we owe to God or the love which we owe our neighbor. Love is the first and the last: the highest good. Life without love is death in life. God is Love. And the love of God is shed in our hearts by His Word.

Prayer.

Almighty God, who hast formed our bodies and hast given us an immortal soul, in whom we live, move, and have our being, shed abroad, we beseech Thee, Thy love in our hearts that we may love Thee who hast first loved us; and let loving consideration for our neighbor fill our hearts. Cause the comfort of Thy heavenly grace to abound in us as the earnest and pledge of joys to come, that, casting away all anxious thought for the transitory things of this world, we may seek first Thy kingdom and righteousness; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

So we should be ever careful
Of the kind of seeds we sow.
Hate from hate is sure to ripen;
Love from love is sure to grow.

100. The Close of the Commandments.

I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me and showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments. *Ex. 20, 5. 6.*

God promises grace and every blessing to all who keep His commandments; therefore we should love and trust in Him and gladly do according to His commandments.

But He threatens to punish all who transgress these commandments. "I am the Lord, thy God," are the solemn words with which He begins the words of His Law to the nations of the world to teach them who He is and to impress upon them His perfect right to issue such commands and to exact strict obedience to them. He also has the power to execute His threats. He adds the words: "I, the Lord, thy God, am a jealous God." He is jealous of His authority, vigilant of every conduct towards it, angry at every rebellion against it. And He will visit the iniquity of the fathers, that is, punish the sins of the fathers, upon the children to the third and fourth generation of them that hate Him. Many a child is a bodily, mental, and moral cripple owing to the sins and vices of one or the other parent or both of them. If a person could only sin by himself and suffer the punishment alone, matters would not be so bad. But if a person sins, he always harms also some one else besides himself. Here we see the fearfulness of sin. Like parents, like children!

Nevertheless, God is not unjust. We read Ezek. 18, 20: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die. The son shall not bear the iniquity of the father, neither shall the father bear the iniquity of the son. The righteousness of the righteous shall be upon him, and the wickedness of the wicked shall be upon him." We must always keep separate moral responsibility and material consequences, personal guilt and inherited affliction. An affliction is no disgrace; it rather is a means of leading us to the Savior, as to an open door of grace, to everlasting salvation.

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we pray Thee so to enlighten our hearts that in the mirror of Thy Law we may duly perceive our many and great sins and seriously consider the state of our souls. Show us that our whole nature is evil by birth and that out of the evil heart evil thoughts and words and deeds without number daily proceed. Show us the dire consequences and the dread wages of transgression, Thy wrath and displeasure, temporal death, and eternal damnation, that we may learn to look with terror at our sins, sincerely repent of them, and seek Thy grace which Thou offerest us in the Gospel. Amen.

Who shall the Lord's elect condemn?
'Tis God that justifies their souls;
And mercy, like a mighty stream,
O'er all their sins divinely rolls.

101. God Is Just.

O Lord, righteousness belongeth unto Thee, but unto us confusion of faces. *Dan. 9, 7.*

God is absolutely just. He judges impartially, without respect of persons. He hates and punishes all wickedness, and He loves and rewards the deeds done in accordance with His holy Law. How can it be otherwise? Because God is holy, yea, Holiness itself, He cannot bear sin and must hate and punish all unholiness and wickedness; everything, however, which is good and holy, the same as He Himself, He must love and reward. If this were not so, He would be unholy and unjust, which is impossible, for it would destroy His very nature and divine being.

For this reason, God threatens to punish all that transgress His commandments. He says: "Cursed is he that confirmeth not all the words of this Law to do them!" "The wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrightousness." When, therefore, the human race fell into sin and all men were made sinners by the disobedience of our first parents, we became an abomination in the sight of God, and He had to pronounce upon us the curse for our sins. God's wrath against the sinners is as unchangeable as His holiness and justice is unchangeable. Luther says: "The suffering of Christ reveals the burning wrath of God against the sinners, whereas He would not even let them go unpunished for His Son's sake if the Son were not willing to redeem them by His death." It was for our sins that the sinless Son of God died on the cross. He died for us, that is, in our stead, for our good. We now are free from God's wrath and punishment. Though we are and will remain sinners as long as we live, our transgressions have all been blotted out, and God is pleased with us for His dear Son's sake.

"The Lord is righteous in all His ways and bountiful in all His works."

Prayer.

O Thou just and righteous God, Thy justice could not but pronounce the curse of damnation upon the sinner. By one man sin entered into the world and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men because all have sinned. But Thou art not only a just and righteous, but also a merciful and gracious God; Thy grace has provided a Savior. Thou so lovedst the world that Thou gavest Thine only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. The chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed from endless woe. Grant us Thy Holy Spirit that we gratefully accept this Thy unmerited grace in Christ Jesus. Amen.

As true as God's own Word is true,
Not earth nor hell with all their crew
Against us shall prevail.
A jest and byword are they grown;
God is with us, we are His own;
Our victory cannot fail.

102. The Destruction of Jerusalem an Example of God's Wrath against Sin.

For Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness, neither shall evil dwell with Thee. *Ps. 5, 4.*

Great were the blessings bestowed upon the children of Israel. Time and again God had proved to them that He was a faithful God. Wonderfully did He lead and bless them. He gave them kings, judges, and prophets. He took them under His arms and guided them. And He sent His only Son to redeem them, to save them and all mankind. But did Israel appreciate what God had done for it? Alas, it rejected all this saving knowledge and transgressed His commandments wilfully and knowingly. We hear the sorrowful complaint of the Son of God: "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not! Behold, your house is left unto you desolate!"

How terribly this prophesy was fulfilled! Forty years later the Romans besieged and finally took and destroyed the city. About a million people lost their lives through famine and through plague or were distributed over the whole Roman Empire to be torn by wild beasts or sold into cruel slavery. The scenes of misery and distress during the siege are simply beyond description. It was great tribulation, such as was not seen since the beginning of the world, nor ever shall be, as the Lord had foretold.

The destruction of Jerusalem is an example of God's just wrath against sin. Let us often think of this warning example. Here we behold God's just punishment upon an ungrateful and hard-hearted people. Let us heed this warning and ask ourselves: Have we dealt better with God than Israel? All the days of our lives God has showered His grace and mercy upon us. Have we been as grateful as we should have been? Have we grown in faith, in love, and in good works? Have we shown any true, loving interest in His Church and the work it is doing? Do you still cling to your God and Savior as the chief Treasure of your soul?

Prayer.

O God, how shamefully has many a one departed from the way and suffered himself to be misled by the devil and evil companions! From a vessel of honor, hallowed to Thee, many a one has become a vessel of wrath and must needs perish forever, unless Thou wilt graciously cleanse him with the blood of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, and save his poor soul. O Lord, look upon him in mercy, for the sake of the most perfect obedience of Thine own dear Son. Amen.

He comes to judge the nations,
A terror to His foes,
A light of consolations,
And blessed hope to those
Who love the Lord's appearing.
O glorious Sun, now come,
Send forth Thy beams so cheering,
And guide us safely home!

103. Of Death.

The wages of sin is death. *Rom. 6, 23.*

God said to Adam: "In the day that thou eatest thereof [of the forbidden fruit] thou shalt surely die." As soon as he and Eve sinned, they were in the power of death. Death always follows sin.

Scripture says of all those who are still under the curse of sin that they are dead in trespasses and sins. Spiritual death is the punishment for all who are born in sin. From this death men can be saved only if the Holy Ghost enlightens them by the Gospel, so that they know Jesus as their Savior, trust and believe in Him, rejoice and take comfort in Him. And after a man has thus been regenerated by a new spiritual birth, let him take heed lest he fall! If he falls back into his sinful state, losing God's grace, it again becomes true of him that *death* is the wages of sin; he relapses into spiritual death. But death also ruins man's bodily life.

As soon as a sinner is born into this life, he is not only spiritually dead, but is also doomed to temporal death. All men must die. This is the punishment attendant upon sin. On account of sin, ruin and destruction comes upon all the children of men. This life with all its pain and sickness, war and worry, is our time of probation, of preparation for death and what follows after death. Once wasted, it never comes back to give us another opportunity; once Death has claimed us for his own, he will never release us again to give us another trial.

We should therefore prepare ourselves to meet death when it comes to claim us. For what comes *after* death? "It is appointed unto men once to die, and *after this the Judgment.*" Man knows that there is a hereafter, with rewards and punishments. But is death also a punishment for the Christian? No; true Christians believe in Jesus Christ, who as their Substitute entered into a contest with death. It was for us that He conquered death. For those who believe in Jesus, death has lost its sting.

Prayer.

O Thou faithful Lord Jesus, give us strength to conquer death by virtue of Thy death and not to fear the grave; for Thou hast hallowed it unto us by Thy burial and hast given us the promise that, because Thou livest, we, too, shall live and be with Thee forever. O Lord, we yearn for the repose of a happy death and have a desire for the joyous resurrection of the body. Oh, let us experience both, and we will forever praise Thee, together with the Father and Holy Ghost. Amen.

When earth can comfort us no more
Nor human help availeth,
The Maker comes Himself, whose store
Of blessing never faileth,
And bends on them a Father's eyes
Whom earth all rest and hope denies;
To God all praise and glory!

104. Triumphant Songs of Faith in View of Death.

Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ! *1 Cor. 15, 57.*

The confession of the Christian Church, "I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting," is the doctrine of the Old Testament as well as that of the New. One of the most brilliant of the numerous gems of the Old Testament giving testimony to this fact is the triumphant song, Job 19, 25—27: "I know that my Redeemer liveth and that He shall stand at the Latter Day upon the earth; and though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God, whom I shall see for myself and mine eyes shall behold, and not another." Job looks beyond death, grave, and decay and beholds the Redeemer and His work, the day of the resurrection of the body and eternal bliss.

Another such triumphant song of faith in view of death is that of aged Simeon, Luke 2, 29: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." What made Simeon so ready to die? It was this: he saw Jesus with the eye of faith as his Salvation prepared by God. Therefore he rejoiced to depart and to enjoy that salvation.

If we see our salvation in Christ Jesus, then, then alone, but then surely, we can depart in peace. Why? Because this Christ Jesus has removed everything which could separate us from God. Sin was a partition-wall between God and us; but here is the Lamb of God, which taketh away our sin. The Law of God accursed us, hell and everlasting death laid claim upon us; but here is the Son of God, who fulfilled the Law in our stead, ransomed us from the power of the grave, and redeemed us from eternal death. How blessed are we Christians by the grace of God! We must die, but our death is but a sleep, upon which follows an awakening. Then we shall triumphantly shout: "O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?" Then all those who believed in their Redeemer in this life shall see Him as He is and enjoy His presence forevermore.

Prayer.

I pray Thee, O Father of grace, so to rule and guide me with Thy holy and good Spirit that I may wholly consecrate myself to Thee for the remaining days of my life, by a Christian walk, by prayer and supplication. And grant to me ever more a state of Christian readiness, so that, whether the time of my departure has been set by Thee for to-day or for some other day, my end may be as peaceful as Simeon's of old, and that, on departing this life, I may enter life eternal. Amen.

Jesus, my Redeemer, lives!
I, too, unto life must waken;
Endless joys my Savior gives;
Shall my courage, then, be shaken?
Shall I fear? Or could the Head
Rise and leave His members dead?

105. Can We Keep God's Commandments Perfectly?

Who can bring a clean thing out of an unclean? Not one.
Job 14, 4.

God demands perfect fulfilment of His Law. Lev. 19, 2 He says: "Ye shall be holy; for I, the Lord, your God, am holy." And Matt. 5, 48: "Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." Can we, then, keep God's commandments as He would have us keep them? Can we keep them perfectly? If we consider that God demands a perfect obedience of the whole Law every minute of our lives, no one will be so blind as to think he can obey the Law in such a manner, and be justified before God because of such obedience.

Does not Scripture say that all have gone aside and are all together become filthy? We read Eccl. 7, 20: "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." And Is. 64, 6: "We are all as an unclean thing, and all our righteousnesses are as filthy rags."

No; since the Fall natural man cannot keep the Law of God at all. And yet the Law was given to man to be obeyed, and obeyed it must be, or we are eternally lost. We cannot obey it, and therefore we *are* lost! Is there no way of escaping this doom? There is. There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the Man Christ Jesus, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life, and no man cometh unto the Father but by Him. Having fully obeyed the entire Law for us, He, Christ, is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth. The regenerate can keep the Law, yet only imperfectly. Even they must daily pray: "And forgive us our trespasses." Even the true Christians must confess with Paul: "Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect; but I follow after."

The moralist, indeed, before his eyes are opened, imagines himself to be righteous. But sooner or later he must see his nakedness before God, because he cannot fulfil the Law's demands.

Prayer.

We pray Thee, Thou God of mercy and grace, reward us not according to our iniquities, but cleanse our hearts and consciences by Thy Word that we may serve Thee in sorrow and in joy and render unto Thee thanks, honor, and praise in time and eternity. Be kind, comforting, gracious, and merciful toward us for the sake of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, who was made under the Law to fulfil it in our stead. Yea, Jesus' blood and righteousness our beauty are and glorious dress. Amen.

All our knowledge, sense, and sight
Lie in deepest darkness shrouded,
Till Thy Spirit breaks our night
With the beams of truth unclouded.
Thou alone to God canst win us;
Thou must work all good within us.

106. Can Man be Saved by the Law?

Whosoever shall keep the whole Law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. *Jas. 2, 10.*

How may we obtain God's grace and forgiveness? What an important question this is, a question involving life and death, damnation and life eternal, the question, How is a man justified? All religions give an answer to this vital question, and with one accord all false religions teach that man is justified by the deeds of the Law. Turk and Pope, heathen and rationalist, declare: Do good, lead an upright life, and God will forgive your sins. Even among those Protestant sects who still confess Christ Crucified, one will find this idea to be ingrafted in their souls, that he who leads a life of earnest prayer and sheds tears of repentance obtains God's grace and is saved through these works of his.

What does Scripture say? A man is justified "without the deeds of the Law." That is a statement repeated a hundred times in the Scriptures, taught clearly and emphatically by all prophets and apostles. True enough, there is the command, "This do, and thou shalt live." Luke 10, 28. But who can do what the Law demands? There is no man upon earth who can fulfil all its commandments. If you expect eternal salvation by the Law, if you think that you can reach heaven by keeping the commands of the Law, you are deceiving yourself. You cannot be justified by the Law which you have broken. Man cannot be saved by the Law. How then? What we have not been able to earn we receive as a gift.

Salvation is free: "It is the gift of God." What shall we say then? Shall we look upon sin as a trifle, as so many frivolous people do? No, we should stand aghast and horrified when it dawns upon our conscience that we have fallen from the dazzling heights of the image of God to the damning depths of the image of Satan. We should learn to tear from our hearts every shred of pharisaic self-conceit as to our goodness and the merit of our works and say, "I am trusting solely in Jesus." We could be justified by the Law if we were able to keep it; but since we cannot do that, it condemns us. We are justified freely by the grace of God. We are the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Prayer.

Lord, we must confess that most of what we have done will be consumed in the last terrible fire, like stubble and straw. To Thee, therefore, we flee, and we pray Thee: Grant that we may be led into the arms of Thy kindness, that we may know that there is One whose mercy is ever new, One whose covenant of peace can never fail, One in whom, when all else fails, the troubled soul can find eternal rest. Let us wholly forget ourselves and look unto Jesus, the Author and Finisher of our faith. Amen.

Not the labors of my hands
Can fulfil Thy Law's demands;
Could my zeal no respite know,
Could my tears forever flow,
All for sin could not atone:
Thou must save, and Thou alone.

107. The Purpose and Uses of the Law.

Thy Word have I hid in mine heart that I might not sin against Thee. *Ps. 119, 11.*

Not only unbelievers cannot fulfil the Ten Commandments, but not even Christians can fully keep them. Why, then, do we preach the Law? "Wherefore, then, serveth the Law?" What purpose does it serve? In the first place, it, in a measure, checks the coarse outbursts of sin and thereby helps to maintain outward discipline and decency in the world. True, it is not in the power of the Law to make men Christians, but it awes and bridles the sinner by its threats and curses and punishments, so that the pent passions of the heart may not have unbridled course. Is not this our common experience? How often are even we Christians, who delight in the Law of God after the inward man, kept from sinning grossly, to which our sinful flesh would seduce us, because the Word of the Lord made a deep impression on our minds and we feared the terrible torments of hell.

It is God's will that we do the works commanded in the Ten Commandments. As the psalmist says: "Thy Word is a lamp unto my feet and a light unto my path." This is another purpose of the Ten Commandments: God wants them to be a rule for us in every walk of human life and endeavor. The Spirit, who kindles faith in the heart, also works the new life of love to God and prompts man to voluntary obedience to His will. The divine Law is the perfect rule of right living, which of all men the Christian seeks to follow more and more.

But the chief purpose of every commandment is to be for us a mirror which is to show us, in strong contrast to divine perfection, our own unrighteousness. Men have by nature a certain knowledge of their sin, but they can come to a true and full knowledge of the deep dye of their sin only when they look into the mirror of the perfect Law of God. The purpose of the Law is to disclose to you the misery and wretchedness of your sinful condition and the fact that on account of it you have merited eternal damnation. And thus the Law serves to prepare you for the reception of the Gospel.

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we pray Thee so to enlighten our hearts that in the mirror of Thy Law we may duly perceive our many and great sins. But grant also that we may ever in true faith lay hold of the all-sufficient merit and obedience of Thy dear Son, trust in Thy grace, and obtain that peace which the world cannot give. Amen.

If in the best of all my actions,
In works that are admired the most,
I must perceive great imperfections,
I surely have no right to boast;
Yet this sweet comfort doth abide:
In mercy only I confide.

It is that mercy never ending,
Which all conception far transcends,
Of Him, who, with love's arms extending,
To wretched sinners condescends;
Whose heart with pity still doth break
Whether we seek Him or forsake.

108. Our Keeping of the Commandments Pleases God.

Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the Law of the Lord. *Ps. 119, 1.*

God adds the promise: "And showing mercy unto thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments." To whom is this promise given? To all those who love Him and keep His commandments. God hates all outward show and is not deceived or satisfied by merely outward works. He demands that the works should flow forth from the right fountain, that is, the proper intention, and be done with an upright heart. He is not satisfied with anything less. And we should not offer Him less. All our obedience to God, all the works we do according to His commandments, must be fruits of love and sincere adherence to God.

And to such pious and God-fearing people God has given the promise to show them mercy, grace, and every blessing. He first gave this promise to the children of Israel. And afterwards He often repeated it in the same and other words through Moses and the prophets. He showed them His bountiful mercy when He led them into a good country, overwhelmed their enemies, and gave them peace, health, and prosperity, — all this out of fatherly kindness and mercy and to make them willing to keep His commandments. And He keeps His promise. How gloriously and richly did He keep it with the children of Israel, far beyond their own merit and worthiness! When some one served Him devotedly and whole-heartedly, He often blessed such godliness for generations to come. And to this day God will make good His promise and richly reward all those who fear, love, and serve Him with an upright heart and walk in the way of His commandments. To this day He promises grace and every blessing to all that keep these commandments. All true Christians do the works which God has commanded, and they abstain from the works which He has forbidden in His Law. Such keeping of the commandments pleases God. And His grace and divine mercy rewards our good works which His Holy Spirit has wrought in us.

Prayer.

Righteous God, merciful Father, in Thy sight nothing in all this world can avail except only the blood and death of Thy beloved Son, by which Thou hast prepared everlasting righteousness for all men, and Thou hatest all who trust in their own works: we thank Thee for Thy great mercy and pray Thee with all our heart graciously to keep us from unbelief, pride, presumption, also from despair and all vices. And make known to us Thy holy will that we may at all times know what is pleasing to Thee and be ever ready to meet Thee. Amen.

O Lord, how shall I meet Thee,
How welcome Thee aright?
All nations long to greet Thee,
My Hope, my heart's Delight!
O kindle, dearest Jesus,
Thy lamp within my breast,
That I may know what pleases
Thee, Lord, my heavenly Guest.

109. Why Must the Law be Preached in All Its Severity?

I had not known sin but by the Law; for I had not known lust except the Law had said, Thou shalt not covet. *Rom.* 7, 7.

Do we always appreciate and estimate at its correct value what we are permitted to hear in our dear Lutheran Church; even this, that in our Church the Law is proclaimed in its fulness and severity? Many wish to hear fine, pretty sermons. Some of our members leave us to join congregations in which they can hear that for which their ears are itching; or they demand that their own minister tread softly in reproving sin. But how foolish they are! For no true conversion can be effected unless the Law is preached in all its severity; nor can Christians learn as they should how to lead a life pleasing to God if it is not pointed out to them by the proper preaching of the Law.

Many ministers preach against murder, drunkenness, coarse forms of unchastity, and the like, but pay little attention to the sinful thoughts leading to these sins. They vehemently condemn the sins which public opinion condemns; but those which it cherishes are overlooked. Such preaching of the Law will never lead to true conversion.

However, if the Law is preached in all its severity, if the pastor makes clear that also hatred of the heart is murder in the sight of God, that malicious judging and condemning makes a man just as liable to be eternally damned as wilful murder, who then can avoid seeing the true condition of his sinful heart, the utter corruption which sin has wrought in him? If these sins damn, who can escape damnation? In whom can he who has come to see his true self in the mirror of the Law find hope except in Jesus, who alone has suffered all the punishment to be inflicted on the damned, suffered it for him, as his Substitute?

With such preaching of the Law a superficial, sham contrition and conversion is out of the question. If, however, the Law is not preached in all its severity, this not only prevents true conversion, but it is also harmful to the new life of a Christian. He will gradually be led to look more to his outward than to his inner life. The result is hypocrisy. The pure heart will be supplanted by a polite outward bearing.

Prayer.

We thank Thee, O Lord, that both Law and Gospel are preached aright to us and in the proper manner. The Law without the Gospel brings despair; the Gospel without the Law would be non-effective and make us indifferent. Let these two chief doctrines together work in us a wholesome fruit of repentance and faith. Let Thy holy Law be preached among us in all its severity; for nothing is more fit to induce us utterly to despair of ourselves and to seek Thy forgiveness through the redemption wrought by Thy dear Son, our Savior. Bless the preaching and reading of Thy Word upon our souls that it may accomplish what pleaseth Thee and prosper in the thing whereto Thou hast sent it, that we who worship here may meet together in the blessed abodes of heaven. Amen.

Just as I am, and waiting not
To rid my soul of one dark blot,
To Thee, whose blood can cleanse each spot,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

110. Of Sin.

Sin is the transgression of the Law. *1 John 3, 4.*

Many think that God has given His Law that we should be justified by fulfilment of it, by perfectly obeying all its commandments. But this is not so, although it seems to be self-evident. Of course, God wants to have us keep His commandments; but He knows better than we do ourselves that in our natural state we are not able to keep them at all as He wants us to keep them, and that even when we have been born again and have become new creatures, we can keep them only imperfectly. Yet the Law is very important. We should always thank God for giving us His holy Law; for "by the Law is the knowledge of sin."

The Law is a clean mirror, which shows us our sins and transgressions! If we honestly examine our hearts and our lives in the mirror of God's holy Law, we shall see innumerable sins staring at us and condemning us. Who among us can truthfully say that he is unpolluted by sin?

Have you seen your true image in the mirror of God's holy Law? Has the picture made you tremble? Have you come to a realization of the awfulness of sin? Moses, the man of God, says in the Ninetieth Psalm: "We are consumed by Thine anger, and by Thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins in the light of Thy countenance." Oh, what an awful day will that great Last Day be for the sinner when he must give account of every idle word, when his whole life, with all evil thoughts, sinful desires, and works, even the secret sins, will be revealed! Or do you imagine that God will overlook this sin and that because, though you broke only one commandment, as you think, you tried to keep the rest? Listen! The Ten Commandments are but as ten links in a chain. Break but one, and you have violated the whole Law, and the divine curse rests upon you. "Whosoever shall keep the whole Law and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all." If you have no substitute to avert the wrath of God, you are doomed. For the Law only reveals our sins; it cannot save us from them. It shows us our disease, but gives no cure. Have you come to a conviction of your sins? Do you tremblingly ask, "Is there no help?"

Prayer.

Holy and almighty God, Thy Law is a mirror wherein we behold our sinful image. But the mirror cannot cleanse us; it damns us; it causes us to cry out, "I am lost!" We therefore flee from the Law to Thy mercy, which is revealed in the Gospel, and pray Thee: O Thou merciful God, who forgivest iniquity and transgression to all who truly repent, create in us a broken and contrite heart that we may sincerely lament our sins and flee to Thee in order to obtain from Thee full remission of our sins through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, our only Mediator and Substitute. Amen.

There's no atonement but His cross,
All earthly means are death and loss:
And through that cross my soul shall stand
Among the just at God's right hand.

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111. All Men Have Original Sin.

That which is born of the flesh is flesh. *John 3, 6.*

Our nature is inclined to all that is evil. The carnal mind is enmity against God. This is original sin: the total depravity of our whole human nature. Original sin is indwelling, inherent in us. Though its guilt is removed by forgiveness and its power broken, it besets even believers all their days; only death will destroy it in them.

Our very natures are totally sinful. It is of the utmost importance to remember this: not only the heathen nature, the drunkard's nature, but mine, ours, everybody's, — all without exception are wanting before God's Law, lacking every good impulse, but teeming with the seeds of a thousand heinous crimes. All men are conceived and born in sin; that is, they are all, from their mother's womb, full of evil desires and propensities, and this is the fountainhead of all other, or actual, sins.

Many deny original sin; but the Bible tells us clearly: "As by one man sin entered into the world and death by sin, and so death passed upon all men for that all have sinned." Rom. 5, 12. Every man is a reeking mass of corruption. His whole soul is by nature so debased and so depraved that no description which can be given of him can fully tell how base and vile he is.

This awful truth is no discovery of human reason, it is a ray of divine revelation enlightening our ignorance. As the Smalcald Articles say: "This hereditary sin is so deep and horrible a corruption of nature that no reason can understand it, but it must be learned and believed from the revelation of Scripture. It is the clear doctrine of our Savior, for He says: Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. It is the clear doctrine of His Apostle Paul; for he writes: 'By one man's disobedience many were made sinners,' and again: 'By the offense of one, judgment came upon *all men* to condemnation.'" All men are conceived and born in iniquity and sin.

Prayer.

O eternal, gracious, and bountiful God in heaven, who hast, out of boundless grace and fatherly care, suffered me to live to this day in good health and in good spirits, I thank Thee for this unmerited love and kindness from my whole heart. Since, alas! I did not spend my life to Thy praise and honor and to the welfare of my neighbor, my perverted nature being inclined to all evil rather than to good, grant, I beseech Thee, O faithful God, that I, who was conceived in sin, may realize my frailty and partake of Thy divine grace. Amen.

Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
Weak and wounded, sick and sore!
Jesus ready stands to save you,
Full of pity, like of yore;
  He is able,
He is willing: doubt no more.

112. What Did Original Sin Bring to Us?

We were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. *Eph. 2, 3.*

Original sin has alienated man from the life of God, so that he is inclined to all that is evil, his mind being enmity against God. And what is the result of this enmity against God? The result is the same as that of all enmity in common life. When we are angry, our judgment becomes clouded. The person we are angry with is judged wrongly and is not treated justly. Neither, therefore, can we, being enemies of God, form a just estimate of Him. And if any one speaks to us of God and brings us divine revelation, "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God." Our dark understanding must first be made light by the Spirit of God before we receive the wisdom of God. Before this is done in us, we regard God's Gospel as foolishness, and we spurn it and disdain the preachers, and if they want to press it on us, we become angry also with them.

And as the judgment of man is clouded, so is his will perverted by original sin; it is wholly turned away from the holiness of God, so that a man does not want to do what is right. Out of sheer stubbornness he refuses to do it. Hence God must work in us not only to *do* a good thing, but also to *will* it.

And as the judgment of natural man is darkened and his will perverted, so also his appetites, his desires, are sinful. Natural man is the slave of sin. Even the Christians feel the sinister power of sin in a greater or less degree until death, and they must constantly be on guard against the thoughts and desires of their hearts. Even in a Christian original sin is like a sleeping lion; the least disturbance makes it rage. It is like an ember imbedded in ashes; if it is blown by the wind of temptation, it will flame up into scandalous evils. As fire is in the match, sin and all wickedness is in man's heart; it only needs an opportunity to come out. Therefore watch your heart!

Prayer.

O my God and Father, I cry from my inmost heart: Abba, my Father and Lord, have mercy on me! O my God, be gracious to me, a poor sinner, and forgive all my sins, original and actual — all thoughts, words, and deeds that, knowingly or unknowingly, were at enmity with Thy Word. There is in me, that is, in my flesh, no good thing. In sins have I been conceived and born, in sins have I lived. O Lord, do not enter into judgment with Thy servant. Be gracious unto me, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Although our sin is great indeed,
God's mercies far exceed it;
His hand can give the help we need,
However much we need it:
He is the Shepherd of the sheep
Who Israel doth guard and keep
And shall from sin redeem him.

113. What Is Actual Sin?

Out of the heart proceed evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, blasphemies. *Matt. 15, 19.*

Our nature even at rest is sinful. But it is never at rest. It has thoughts and desires, suggestions and purposes; and these motions and acts of the soul are sin.

Actual sin is everything whereby evil is committed or good omitted, against God's Law. When you slander your neighbor, you commit evil and sin; if you do not defend him when slandered, you omit good and therefore sin. "To him that knoweth to do good and doeth it not, to him it is sin." Many people say that they harm no one. But the question will also be asked of them, "What good have you done?" The fig-tree had harmed no one, yet it was cursed by Christ because it had done no good. Not only every tree bearing no fruit shall be hewn down and cast into the fire, but also every tree that bringeth forth no *good* fruit.

There are sins of the heart, of the eye, of the tongue, and sins of action.

Do not try to persuade yourself that your sin is only a little sin. There are no little sins. Every sin is a great sin. Even when the believer sins involuntarily, it is a grievous sin in the sight of God; but as his faith clings to God's forgiving grace, his sin is at once forgiven by the all-sufficient merits of Christ. But if he sins voluntarily, however, with a set purpose, against the warning of his conscience, he falls from faith, and his sin is unforgiven, whether great or small. All our little omissions are great sins. And to the unbeliever every sin is an unforgiven sin. Even his seeming virtues are sins because he does not believe and trust in God and does not love and fear Him. "Without faith it is impossible to please God."

"Whatsoever is not of faith is sin." Do not despise sins because they seem small. How difficult is it for you to renounce the one which is your darling sin! Take heed of this one sin, especially if it is a secret sin! Every sin entails guilt.

Prayer.

O Lord, almighty God and heavenly Father, I pray Thee, as Thy dear child, graciously preserve me to my last breath in Thy saving Word and enlighten my heart with Thy Holy Spirit that I may know what is good or evil. All sin that I have knowingly committed, also my secret faults, I ask Thee in mercy to forget. Also help me, dear Father, by Thy grace, to begin a new life well-pleasing to Thee and to the benefit of my soul. I commend myself to Thy divine protection and fatherly blessing. Give me peace through Jesus Christ, my only Helper, and comfort me by the true Comforter, the Holy Ghost. Amen.

Holy Ghost, with power divine,
Cleanse this guilty heart of mine;
Long hath sin, without control,
Held dominion o'er my soul.

114. Sins of Weakness.

Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation; the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. *Matt. 26, 41.*

A true believer remains a sinner as long as he lives. When a Christian through his old Adam daily falls short of his high calling; when a man out of sudden fear is led to sin; when a quick-tempered man in a fit of passion does a wrong in word or action for which he at once is sorry, we may say he sins from weakness of his flesh, unwillingly.

Against these sins the Christians daily fight and pray the reconciled Father to forgive them. This they do daily because they have a general knowledge of their weakness and sinfulness. And they do it in every case where they know that they have committed a special sin. Listen to the rueful complaint of St. Paul over his sins of weakness in chapter 7 of his Epistle to the Romans, which will show you the nature of these sins in the children of God. The apostle says: "To will is present with me, but how to perform that which is good I find not. For the good that I would I do not, but the evil which I would not, that I do. Now, if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me. I find, then, a law that, when I would do good, evil is present with me. For I delight in the Law of God after the inward man; but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members. O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death? I thank God through Jesus Christ, our Lord. So, then, with the mind I myself serve the Law of God, but with the flesh the law of sin."

Such sins of weakness are not premeditated, deliberately planned and executed. When people sin knowingly and wilfully, they have the best proof that they are no Christians, no matter what office they hold in the church, or what liberal church-dues they pay, or how often they go to church and pray.

Prayer.

Merciful God, loving Father, I thank Thee most heartily that Thou hast graciously kept me to this hour from all harm of body and soul, and I pray Thee, for the sake of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, graciously to forgive all sins which I have committed against Thee in thought, word, and deed, and to remember them no more in all eternity. And now I commend my body and soul, my heart, mind, all my thoughts and meditations and imaginations, all that I am and do, to Thy protection. Guard me with Thy almighty arm that no foe will be able to pluck me out of Thy hand. Amen.

Not from my foes without, but those within,
I pray to be protected hour by hour;
For that aggressive self that leads to sin
And lures to pleasure with seductive power
Stands over by the portal of desire
And mocks my spirit when it would aspire.

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115. Mortal Sins.

Brethren, be not children in understanding; howbeit, in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men. *1 Cor. 14, 20.*

Sins of weakness are committed only by believers, mortal sins by unbelieving and godless people. Sins of weakness, or venial sins, are done by the children of God against their will; mortal sins, or sins of malice, are committed by unbelievers intentionally and deliberately. True believers daily fight against the sins of weakness; mortal sins are wilful sins. All sins of weakness are forgiven for Jesus' sake, because the sinner did not lose his faith; but mortal sins are committed by unbelievers and are not forgiven them. Note how St. John speaks of these two kinds of sin. Speaking of sins of weakness, he says Christians still *have* sin; speaking of mortal sins, he says a man *commits* them, that is, deliberately. Speaking of sins of weakness, he includes Christians and says: "If we say we *have* no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us." 1 John 1, 8. Speaking of sins of malice, he excludes the Christians and says: "He that *committeth* sin is of the devil; whosoever is born of God doth not *commit* sin." 1 John 3, 8. 9. The Savior says the same: "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever *committeth* sin is the servant of sin." John 8, 34. When a Christian sins, the devil, the world, and his own flesh deceive him and use him as their tool; but as soon as he sees his sin, he feels sorry for it and pleads with David: "Keep back Thy servant from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me." But when a man *commits* sin, that is, knowingly, willingly, he is no Christian, or no longer a Christian; he is of the devil; he is the slave of sin.

When the Holy Ghost sees you sin without and against your will, he will not depart from you; but if he sees you do it wilfully, He will be grieved and leave you. Just as a friend will forgive you if you hurt him accidentally, but will withdraw from you if he learns that you plan evil against him.

Prayer.

O almighty God and benignant Father, I return thanks to Thee for having again graciously kept me in body and soul from all harm and ill. Whatever sin I have committed, with heart, tongue, or otherwise, against Thee and Thy holy commandments, forgive, I beseech Thee, according to Thy loving-kindness and forsake me not, whom Thou hast bought with a price, with the precious blood and by the bitter Passion of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Grant that I Thy Passion view
With repentant grieving,
Nor Thee crucify anew
By unholy living.
How could I refuse to shun
Every sinful pleasure
Since for me God's only Son
Suffered without measure?

116. The Sin against the Holy Ghost.

The blasphemy against the Holy Ghost shall not be forgiven unto men. *Matt. 12, 31.*

The sin against the Holy Ghost is the gravest of all sins. But even this sin, though it consists in the malicious denial of the heavenly truth by one who has been taught it and blasphemous and pernicious opposition to it, is unpardonable not on account of its greatness, but on account of its nature.

It is not a sin against the person of the Holy Ghost, but against His office. For the Holy Ghost has a special office to perform. His office is to lead us through the means of grace to Christ, our Savior, and thus to make us children of God. For we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost must call us by the Gospel, enlighten us with His gifts, sanctify and keep us in the true faith. Now, if He comes to a person in the Gospel and shines in his heart, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and that person is divinely convinced of the truth of the Gospel, his soul is greatly moved, and he opens his mouth to pray and to praise the Lord; if such a man later denies that conviction and the known heavenly truth, opposing the work of the Holy Ghost in his heart, and *wilfully* and *persistently* hardens himself against his better knowledge and with satanic malice blasphemes the truth and speaks against the Gospel: then he commits the sin against the Holy Ghost.

One of the characteristic features of this sin is that men do it knowingly, willingly, deliberately, blasphemously, and persistently. Scripture says Heb. 6: "It is impossible for those who were once enlightened and have tasted of the heavenly gift and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost and have tasted the good Word of God and the powers of the world to come, if they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance." But as long as you do not *wish* to commit this appalling sin, you surely have *not* committed it.

Prayer.

O heavenly Father, do Thou preserve me from sin and all evil, from the wiles of the devil, from the offenses of the world, and from the evil lusts of my own sinful flesh. Let me not follow those who crucify to themselves Thy dear Son afresh and put Him to an open shame. Grant unto me patience, hope, and perseverance. And when the time of my sojourning is at an end, O grant unto me an easy and a blessed death through Jesus Christ, my Savior and Redeemer, to whom be glory forever and ever! Amen.

To-day you live, to-day repent;
Perhaps your life will soon be spent.
To-day you're well, your cheeks are red,
To-morrow sick, yea, even dead.

117. How Boundless and Appalling Sin Is.

Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out. *Acts 3, 19.*

We are willing to confess that we are sinners; yet who among us can understand how boundless and appalling sin is? Who knows precisely how far a thing may be a sin which we imagine to be a virtue? Where we think we are right, who knows but that we may be wrong? Where we have arrived at the conclusion that we have done a good thing, who among us is quite sure that he has not been mistaken?

Who, again, can know the number of his sins? The mightiest mind cannot count the sins of a single day. We might sooner tell the grains of sand on the seashore than the iniquities of one man's life. But before God the guilt of even one sin merits His eternal wrath and punishment.

To understand the whole depth of the guilt of sin is quite beyond human power. We are not to think merely of the sins that grow on the surface, but also of the multitude of unborn iniquity, germs of sin that lie slumbering in the soul. Your heart is permeated with sin as the heated piece of iron is with fire. Temptations are the hammers plied upon it. The sparks fly lustily; your sins are the sparks. Can you count them? Can you guess the number of the unborn sparks that still lie latent and hidden in the mass of iron? We must confess: "Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me."

Think, then, of the spirituality of the divine Law, its extent and strictness. The bare letter is nothing compared with the whole stupendous meaning and severe strictness of the rule. The Law deals with every act, every offense, without hope of pardon. The Law, too, extends to sins of thought; the imagination of evil is sin. To keep this Law is utterly beyond our power. We do not even know the entire fulness of its meaning.

Prayer.

Spare Thy people, O Lord, and give not Thine heritage to reproach; let us not bear our sins. Thou hast forgiven the iniquity of Thy people; Thou hast covered all their sins. Thou hast taken away all Thy wrath; Thou hast turned Thyself from the fierceness of Thine anger. Turn us, O God of our salvation, and cause Thine anger toward us to cease. Save us, who trust in Thee alone and neither have, nor know of, any refuge elsewhere. Cleanse us from our secret faults. Save us by Thy grace, for by the Law we never can be saved. Amen.

O Savior, do not chide me!
From Thee I will not part;
Here will I stand beside Thee
When breaks Thy loving heart;
When soul and body languish
In death's last fatal grasp,
Then, in Thy deepest anguish,
Thee in mine arms I'll clasp.

118. How We are Made Free from Sin.

Christ is the end of the Law for righteousness to every one that believeth. *Rom. 10, 4.*

The salvation of the soul is not by works that we are doing, so that we would have to earn heaven by fulfilling the Law, nor can it be purchased with sacrifices and offerings of man. St. Paul writes to the Corinthians: "Ye were bought with a price." We did not ourselves purchase our own freedom, we were purchased, redeemed, by God Himself. What ransom, what price, God paid for us Paul states Rom. 8, 32, saying: "God spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all." The price for our liberty was high — it cost God His only Son. And now every one that believes in Him receives God's forgiveness.

In what *manner* does God forgive sin? There are many who believe that God forgives sin by making us good and holy, expelling all sinfulness from our nature. They say: If a man wants to know whether he has forgiveness of sin or not, let him search his heart; if he still finds any sinfulness there, then his sins are not yet forgiven. But that is a terrible doctrine and must fill a sinner with despair. For who can say: "I have made my heart clean, I am pure from all sin and iniquity"?

How, then, does God forgive sin? God's Book answers: "Blessed is he whose sin is *covered.*" God forgives sins by covering them, by hiding them, as it were, from His sight. How can God do that and still remain the just and righteous God who cannot break His own Law, but must carry out its fearful threat: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"? He can do it because He has already punished our sins in Christ. God's own dear Son, in our stead and for our sakes, paid the penalty pronounced upon our sins by the Law. He was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. God in His mercy, for Christ's sake, does not charge the believer's sins to his, but to Christ's account, and Christ's all-sufficient, saving merit He charges to the sinner's account.

Prayer.

Eternal and merciful God, if Thou wouldst deal with me according to my deserts, I should be, and forever remain, a child of wrath and eternal damnation. But, O my loving God and Father, I take comfort in Thy great mercy and in Thy grace unfathomable, infinite, unspeakable, and without measure; a grace Thou Thyself dist promise and confirm. Therefore, I do not despair, but confess unto Thee all my sins, my evil thoughts and desires, my sinful words and deeds, both secret and known, and plead guilty in Thy sight of being a great malefactor and evildoer, fully relying on Thy dear Son's complete fulfilment of Thy Law in my stead and on His bitter suffering and death, wherewith He atoned for all my sins, merited Thy grace and favor, and opened heaven for me. Amen.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.

119. What the Gospel Is.

I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. *Rom. 1, 16.*

What is the Gospel? The Gospel is the glad tidings of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The Gospel is the joyful message that the God of heaven had compassion on us, His fallen creatures, and sent a Savior to save us from our sins. The Gospel is the wonderful story of Jesus Christ, telling us who He is, how He came into this world, what He did and taught, for what purpose He suffered and died, and how He rose again and ascended to heaven. The Gospel tells us that the Son of God suffered the punishment which we had deserved on account of our sins, that He won for us forgiveness of sin and righteousness before God, and that God the Father accepted the work of His beloved Son by raising Him from the dead and crowning Him with honor and majesty. The Gospel tells us that Jesus Christ merited the righteousness for us which avails in the sight of God and that He prepared everlasting mansions in heaven for us, and it invites, yea, urges us to look to Him and be saved by Him. The Gospel says: "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from all sin." The Gospel tells us: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

So the Gospel brings Christ and His salvation nigh unto us. Christ has earned eternal salvation for us, the Gospel brings it to us, and faith receives and holds it — surely a plain, simple, and direct way to heaven!

Come, then, to Christ just as you are, with all your sins. Forgiveness, pardon, grace, His eternal kingdom with all its riches, is yours free of charge, without money and without price. Is not that the sweetest story ever told? What message is sweeter to the prisoner than the news of his pardon and freedom? We verily have a glorious Gospel, and we may well say with St. Paul: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

Prayer.

Merciful God, with a solemn oath Thou hast promised and said: "As I live, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." I take comfort in Thine only-begotten Son, mine only Redeemer, Justifier, and Mediator, who by virtue of His obedience, suffering, and death has regained Thy favor for me and has given me, who believes in Him, power to be and remain Thy child and an heir of salvation. He is the Water of Life, which alone can give health to my soul. Amen.

I heard the voice of Jesus say,
Behold, I freely give
The living water; thirsty one,
Stoop down and drink and live.
I came to Jesus, and I drank
Of that life-giving stream;
My thirst was quenched, my soul
revived,
And now I live in Him.

120. The Difference between the Law and the Gospel.

The letter killeth, but the Spirit giveth life. *2 Cor. 3, 6.*

The contents of Holy Scripture are twofold: Law and Gospel. Both are necessary for us. The Law teaches what we are to do; the Gospel teaches what God has done, and still does, for our salvation. The Law teaches knowledge of sin; the Gospel shows us our Savior. The Law condemns us for our sins, terrifies and humbles us before the holy God, so that we learn to despair of being able to save ourselves; the Gospel promises, gives, and seals unto us, forgiveness, life, and salvation. The Law does not promise heaven to you; on the contrary, it tells you very plainly that you will go to hell; it works wrath and kills; it tells you that you must love God with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength, and your neighbor as yourself; and you must acknowledge and confess that such a perfect love is not in your heart. What, then, does the Law teach but the wrath of God because you have not fulfilled its precepts? But what does the Gospel do? It invites and draws us to Christ, kindles faith in our hearts, and thus works spiritual life in us. It teaches righteousness. It tells us that we are righteous in the sight of God by faith in our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, that for the sake of His dear Son, who bled and died for us on the cross, God will not lay a single sin to our charge.

These two doctrines, Law and Gospel, faith and works, must not be confused or blended together; if that is done, the way of salvation is obscured. Whoever says that man must do his part, whereupon God will also do His, or that man is justified and saved by faith *and* works, obliterates the proper distinction between Law and Gospel, faith and works, grace and merit. The distinction between Law and Gospel, therefore, is of paramount importance.

Prayer.

Lord God, this twofold doctrine of Thy holy Word, Law and Gospel, affects our principles, sentiments, motives, aims, and all our works and doings. Let us well understand and rightly divide them in every situation of our lives. We entreat Thee of Thy fatherly goodness, let the curse of the Law make us despair of our own ability to merit Thy favor and eternal life, so that we shall gratefully accept the Gospel, the message of Thy grace through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, and thereupon willingly lead a Christian life, prepare for a blessed departure, and, finally, fall asleep and rest in peace and joy, until Thou wilt call us forth again unto life; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Jesus, Thy blood and righteousness
My beauty are, my glorious dress;
In these Thy precious gifts arrayed,
With joy shall I lift up my head.

121. The Different Relations of Men to the Law.

When we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the Law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death. But now we are delivered from the Law, that being dead wherein we were held, that we should serve in newness of spirit and not in the oldness of the letter. *Rom. 7, 5. 6.*

The unconverted are always under the dominion of the Law, let them do what they will. Yet we behold this difference among the unconverted, that some live in manifest vices, while others lead a moral and virtuous life. What are we to make of this difference? It comes about in this way: Sin has corrupted man's whole nature, and when he hears the Law, which forbids sin, the evil lust within man becomes alive and wants to break out in deeds. Man can now do two things: he can either set aside the Law and surrender himself to the will of sin, or he can argue: "I must do good works to escape punishment." In the latter case the Law *seems* to bring forth good fruit in one who is still unconverted; and in a worldly sense that which he does is indeed good. Virtue is praiseworthy and has its reward in this life. But when a man avoids evil works for fear of punishment and does good works because he hopes to be rewarded therefor, those are motives which the Law itself condemns. It says to such persons, "Woe unto you!"

But when a man is converted to Christ, his relation to the Law is essentially changed. In conversion man is made a new creature; his heart, mind, and sentiments are wholly changed, so that he looks upon the Law in an altogether different light. In conversion the soul is divorced from this terrible husband, the Law, and is married to another, to Jesus. In Him the soul finds a totally different kind of husband. He takes His bride to His bosom and fondly addresses her thus: "Be not afraid, only believe! Believe in Me, confidently trust in Me. Thou needest labor no more. Behold, I have labored for thee and earned for thee all that thou needest."

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus, Thou exalted and beloved Son of God, I thank Thee with all my heart that Thou didst not only become a true man in my behalf, but didst also place Thyself under the Law for my sake and didst labor unto death, in order that I might be redeemed from the curse of the Law and that my soul might be cleansed from its base impurities. For this I acknowledge myself in duty bound to present myself to Thee as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. To this end, O dearly beloved Savior, lend me Thine aid for the sake of Thy suffering and death with which Thou hast redeemed me. Amen.

Delay not, delay not, O sinner, draw near,
The waters of life are now flowing for thee;
No price is demanded; the Savior is here;
Redemption is purchased, salvation is free.

122. Testimonies for the Truth of the Gospel.

If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater; for this is the witness of God which He hath testified of His Son. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself.
1 John 5, 9. 10.

Every Christian has experienced in his own heart the wonderful power of the Gospel. Every Christian has this testimony for the divine truth of the Gospel which the Holy Ghost makes effective in his heart. Such testimony assures a Christian that the Gospel of Christ is not a delusion, but divine truth. The Gospel will fill his heart with the peace of God and with the firm conviction that all his sins are forgiven. If you have this testimony in your heart, you can say: "I know whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that Day."

Another testimony for the truth of the Gospel are the prophecies in the Old Testament and their exact fulfilment in the New. One should scarcely think that a person having such evidence before him could entertain the least shadow of a doubt as to the divine truth of the Gospel. Can any one deny that the description of Christ which we have in the New Testament corresponds exactly with the description of the Messiah which we have in the Old Testament? Have not all the prophecies been literally fulfilled in the Lord Jesus Christ? Search the Scriptures if any doubts arise in your minds as to the truth of the Gospel. The testimony of the Scripture is able to dispel all your doubts and to confirm you in the faith that the Gospel is divine truth.

Still another testimony for the truth of the Gospel are the many eye-witnesses who saw Christ after His resurrection. They conversed with the risen Lord. They ate and drank with Him. With their own eyes they saw Him ascend to heaven. And these eye-witnesses were intelligent men, honorable, trustworthy persons, whose characters were beyond reproach. Let us glory in our faith, which overcometh the world, and thank our God for such overwhelming evidence of the truth.

Prayer.

O Lord God, Thou hast given us many and overwhelming testimonies for the truth of Thy divine Gospel, for which we heartily thank Thee. And we pray Thee, let these testimonies dispel all our doubts and silence all objections. O let us appreciate more and more the truth of the Gospel which Thou hast granted unto us so abundantly! Grant us Thy Holy Spirit. Come with comfort to the weak, teach the wretched Thy way, help the fallen, guide the erring, and hold them with Thy right hand. Be Thou our light in darkness, our salvation in life, our comfort in death. Amen.

O Holy Ghost, Thou precious Gift,
Thou Comforter unfailing,
O'er Satan's snares our souls uplift,
And let Thy power availing
Avert our woes and calm our dread;
For us the Savior's blood was shed,
We trust in Thee to save us.

123. Jesus Is the Promised Messiah.

God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power. *Acts 10, 38.*

We believe that God in His infinite mercy resolved to save mankind and that the divine Redeemer appeared in Jesus of Nazareth, the Son of Mary and Son of God. Immediately after the Fall, God promised this Savior, who, by suffering and dying in man's stead, was to deliver him from all sin and its punishment.

When, at length, the fulness of time had come, God sent His angel Gabriel to Mary, a virgin of David's royal lineage, to tell her: "Thou shalt bring forth a Son and shalt call His name Jesus." Jesus means Savior. Therefore the angel added to Joseph: "For He shall save His people from their sins." Hence, by giving the name Jesus to the Child of Mary, God declared this Child to be the promised Messiah.

In the Old Testament, God has given a full description of the Messiah's person, and so perfectly does that description correspond with Jesus' person that no one who sincerely accepts and believes the clear word of Scripture will look for another Savior. In the Old Testament, God stated the time when the Messiah should come, the place where He should be born, and the family and people from whom He was to descend. And who is it that, in every detail, exactly answers to this description? Only Jesus Christ. The promised Messiah was also to perform the greatest of miracles, He was to proclaim the Gospel, the glad tidings of the forgiveness of sins, and He was to be preceded by a forerunner, who was to go before Him to prepare His way. And has not all this been fulfilled in Jesus?

Let us, therefore, lift up our heads in triumph and rejoice in our faith, which is so well founded that even the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. Blessed is he who accepts Christ as his Savior and King, in whom all promises of God are yea and Amen.

Prayer.

O merciful, eternal God, heavenly Father, we, Thy children, thank Thee from our inmost hearts that Thou hast so faithfully kept Thy promise and didst turn to us Thy heart in fatherly love by sending to us the highest Good, Thine only-begotten Son, to be our Savior, and by making us acceptable in Thy Beloved.

We thank Thee, Lord Jesus, that Thou hast appeared in the fulness of time to become our Brother. We pray Thee, O God the Holy Ghost, to bring about this wonderful change, that this our Savior be spiritually born in us and that He may grow in us every day of our lives. Help us to find comfort in Him amidst all temptations. Amen.

Come, Thou long-expected Jesus,
Born to set Thy people free.
From our fears and sins release us;
Let us find our rest in Thee.

124. All the Prophets Testified of Christ.

To Him give all the prophets witness that through His name, whosoever believeth in Him, shall receive remission of sins.

Acts 10, 43.

If any one doubts whether our Christian faith is built on a rock which cannot be moved, let him search the writings of all the prophets, let him compare what is said of Him who was promised with the writings of the New Testament, and he cannot but see that all has been fulfilled in Christ. All writings of the holy men of God, from the First Book of Moses to the last book of the prophets, testify of Christ. Whatever was said of the Messiah by the prophets of old has come true in the crucified and risen Savior.

Into His hands we can cheerfully entrust our souls without fear and without scruple. Believing in Him, we have the one true faith and are God's own people, true spiritual children of the patriarchs of old. And because all the promises based on this Savior are divinely true, none of them can fail. "As God is true," says Paul to the Corinthians, "our word towards you was not yea and nay. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached among you by us, was not yea and nay, but in Him was yea. For all the promises of God in Him are yea, and in Him Amen, unto the glory of God."

As the promise given to Abraham that out of his seed He should come in whom all the families of the earth would be blessed came true, even so must all the promises of God in Jesus Christ come true; not one of them will fall to the ground. To David the promise was made that of his house the Savior should come.

Now, his children were led into captivity, and the prospects of the promise's ever coming true seemed slender indeed. Yet that little remnant of the Jews which held faithfully to the Lord's promise was not deceived. No man who with earnest intent will search the Scriptures of the Old Testament and compare them with the New will deny that the promise has been fulfilled in Jesus of Nazareth.

Prayer.

Awake, my soul, and rejoice in the Lord, thy Savior; magnify the Highest, who has so faithfully fulfilled His promise and sent His Son into the world. Exult and be glad; for God Himself, out of love to thee, became man and thy next kinsman. Who can sufficiently praise His mercy and loving-kindness? O Lord, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, and the son of man that Thou considerest him? O dearest Jesus, I heartily thank Thee that Thou didst unite Thyself with our human nature and in this assumed humanity didst reconcile us with Thy heavenly Father! Amen.

What the fathers' ancient throng
Hoped and held with yearnings strong
And foretold long ere its date,
Stands fulfilled sublimely great.

125. Christ's Birth at Bethlehem.

Fear not; for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day, in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. *Luke 2, 10. 11.*

What man needed was a Savior, a Deliverer mightier than the forces that held him bound, and such a one God had promised man. Adam and Eve, leaving Paradise, were consoled by the promise of the Seed of the Woman, the Savior, who should bruise the head of the Serpent. Seth, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob looked forward to that Deliverer and were sustained by the hope that the Savior would come soon. Succeeding saints and prophets took up the pleading strain: "Oh, that the Salvation of Israel were come out of Zion!" and sang and prophesied of His advent. Finally, when the fulness of time was come, He arrived; and in what manner? "God was manifest in the flesh." "The Word was made flesh." "Unto us a Child is born."

The Savior of the world was *born.* God has become our Brother; He appeared among us in our own likeness, in the form of man, like us in all respects with the exception of sin.

Why did the Son of God become man? That in our stead He might fulfil the commandments of God and atone for all our transgressions by painful suffering and bitter death. The Babe of Bethlehem is our Savior, our Redeemer. Could we receive gladder tidings than these? Could there be a greater evidence of God's love to man?

This was indeed the accepted time and the day of salvation promised by the prophets. When the long-hoped-for Messiah appeared in the flesh and performed the great work of redemption, by which the whole fallen human race was reconciled with God, behold, then the day of salvation had come; then God showed that He is kind to sinful man, that He truly loves the world, the world of sinners. How gloriously did God's kindness and love appear in the birth of Christ in Bethlehem! Should not this stir us to the highest pitch of gratitude? The shepherds went and told others. Let the glorious truth receive universal proclamation!

Prayer.

O Lord God, heavenly Father, Thy grace is too far beyond our understanding, Thy kindness too immeasurable, Thy glory too radiant, to enable us to realize its magnitude. Therefore we ask Thee to open our eyes that we may see the wonders of Thy grace, to move our hearts that they may be borne away with Thy loving-kindness, and to make our tongues burn to praise it worthily. The angel's message resounds in our hearts: "Unto you is born this day a Savior." Amen.

Veiled in flesh the Godhead see,
Hail th' incarnate Deity.
Pleased as man with man to dwell —
Jesus, our Emmanuel.

Let us all with gladsome voice
Praise the God of heaven,
Who, to bid our hearts rejoice,
His own Son hath given.

126. Jesus Came as the Savior of All People.

He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world. *1 John 2, 2.*

The angel of the Lord addressed the shepherds thus: "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to *all people.*" As whose Savior, then, did the Son of God come? O joyful message, as the Savior of all people! The Gospel enters the world with the broad, universal look of daylight. "The Dayspring from on high hath visited us." The sun rises every morning, shining for all and singling out none. There is a universality of kindness about it. The poorest man and the richest, all classes and all things, have the same access to its undivided radiance. So the Christ-story is as wide and open to all as is this earth. It singles out none, it excludes none, it wishes to blaze and bless a whole guilty world spiritually just as the sun does bodily. Its contents are glad tidings of God's grace and love, "which shall be to all people," "to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace." O joyful message "to all people"! — that is, to all that ever lived on the face of the earth and to the last man that shall be born before the coming of the Day of Judgment.

You, too, are included. You have a claim upon this Savior. Though your sins be as many as the sands on the seashore and as black as night, this Savior of all people extends His hands also to you and bids you rejoice in His full forgiveness and salvation. You have as much right to this Savior as the greatest saint, though your past deeds were ever so foul; for this Savior is He who came to seek and to save that which was lost. He is the Lamb of God, that taketh away the sins of the world.

Come, then, and say, It is true and certain, Thou art mine also, my Brother, my God, my Savior, for Thou hast come as the Savior of all.

Prayer.

I praise Thee, O Jesus, that Thou didst come upon this earth to deliver us from our enemies, from sin, death, hell, and the devil, with Thy holy blood to effect an eternal reconciliation between Thy heavenly Father and us, and by Thy precious merits to regain for us our lost righteousness. Thou didst descend to us poor mortals in this vale of tears from the throne of Thy divine majesty in order to save us lost and condemned sinners, none excepted. For this unmerited love I praise Thee, O Jesus, Thou King of Glory, with all my strength and energy. Hosanna, O Lord, save now, O Lord, send now prosperity! Amen.

Israel's Strength and Consolation,
Hope of all the saints Thou art
Dear Desire of every nation,
Joy of every longing heart.

127. Jesus Wrought Great Miracles.

He was declared to be the Son of God with power. *Rom. 1, 4.*

The deeds which Jesus performed exactly correspond to what the prophets said the Messiah would do. What deeds was the Messiah to perform according to the prophecies of the Old Testament? In the thirty-fifth chapter of his prophecies, Isaiah says of the Messiah and of His time: "Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as a hart and the tongue of the dumb sing." And when Jesus came, He could refer to this very prophecy, saying, "The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up." Jesus means to say, How can you doubt that I am He that should come? Do you not see that I am performing exactly those deeds which, according to the prophecies, the Messiah was to perform?

The four gospels of the New Testament are almost one continued narrative of divine miracles wrought by Jesus, and these were written that we should believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, we might have life through His name.

When Jesus had performed His first miracle in Cana of Galilee, we are expressly told of His disciples: "And His disciples believed on Him." Think of the ever-increasing astonishment of His disciples as they witnessed His miracles and became convinced that He was the Christ, the Son of the living God. How they must have praised their great fortune of being permitted to be with Him! God is constantly manifesting His glory all around us. Every new day, every new crop, every new-born child, is a miracle as great as the turning of water into wine or the stilling of the storm on the Sea of Galilee, yes, even greater.

Let us not pass stupidly through all this array of wonders! Let us see and comprehend! Let us open our hearts and be grateful! Let us pray, praise, and give thanks!

Prayer.

O dearest Lord Jesus, in every deed Thou didst show Thyself the God of the Gentiles and the Jews, and being the true Light for all men that come into the world, Thou wouldst illumine all men unto eternal life. Lead us, O kindly Light, that we may always honor and adore Thee as our only King and Savior. Thou hast brought us poor heathen into Thy Kingdom of Grace and given us the saving knowledge of Thyself. Thou hast wrought in us the miracle of faith. For this we heartily rejoice and praise Thee. Amen.

Thou, O Christ, art all I want,
More than all in Thee I find;
Raise the fallen, cheer the faint,
Heal the sick and lead the blind.

Just and holy is Thy name,
I am all unrighteousness;
False and full of sin I am,
Thou art full of truth and grace.

128. Jesus Christ Is True God.

This is the true God and eternal Life. *1 John 5, 20.*

"What think ye of Christ? Whose Son is He?" Is He truly the Son of God? This question is vastly important. The answer to this question decides the destiny of every individual soul. According as the Gospel of Jesus Christ is accepted or rejected, will men stand or fall. And how is this vital question to be decided? There are many conclusive and incontrovertible proofs that Jesus Christ is true God.

We look at Christ's spotless character and His immaculate life. We listen to His heavenly teachings. Merely human mind and merely human lips never conceived and spoke as He did. He taught as one having authority and not as the scribes. He was the Teacher come from God; He Himself is true God.

And how clearly did He manifest His divine glory through innumerable miracles which He performed in His own power! His disciples testify: "We beheld His glory, the glory as of the Only-begotten of the Father." God calls from heaven and says: "This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." Jesus Himself testifies time and again that He is Christ, the Son of the Blessed.

Numerous passages of the New Testament bear witness to the fact that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Holy Writ ascribes divine honor to Him, saying: "All should honor the Son even as they honor the Father." All men should believe in Him and be baptized in His name in order to be saved. And how can man be saved? "No man can by any means redeem his brother nor give God a ransom for him." It required One who was and is more than mere man to do that — the Son of God, who became man. There is no proof so powerful that Christ is God as the sacrifice on Calvary. Who can look upon that scene without exclaiming with the centurion under the cross, "Truly, this was the Son of God!"? If Christ were not God, no man could be saved.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou art the Second Person in the Holy Trinity; Thou art begotten of the divine substance of the Father from all eternity, God of God, very God of very God, Light of Light; Thou art the express image of Thy heavenly Father and the brightness of His glory, the true God and eternal Life, who in the fulness of time didst assume our flesh and blood and become man. Thou art the Dayspring from on high that hath visited us; the Sun of Righteousness, which has risen unto us with healing in His wings. O come, Thou Light of the world, whose origin and coming are divine, and shine into our hearts. Thou art very God of very God, begotten, not made; being of one substance with the Father and for us men and for our salvation Thou camest down from heaven and wast incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary. Glory be to Thee forever and ever! Amen.

True Son of the Father, He comes from the skies;
To be born of a virgin He does not despise.

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129. Jesus Christ, the Rock of Ages.

Upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. *Matt. 16, 18.*

The Lord Jesus says that He will build His Church, that is, all His believers, on such a solid rock that even hell shall not prevail against it, though it should open all its gates and send all its hosts against the Christians. What is this rock? The disciples had been asked by the Lord: "Who do men say that I, the Son of Man, am?" They answered: "Some say that Thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias or one of the prophets." He then asked them: "But who say ye that I am?" Then Simon Peter answered and said: "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." And Jesus answered and said to him: "Blessed art thou, Simon Barjona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. And I say unto thee, That thou art Peter [a rock-man], and upon this rock I will build My Church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."

Now, which is the rock that we asked for? The Lord calls Simon Peter blessed because he confessed *Him* as the Christ, the Son of the living God. Yes, He calls him Peter, that is, a rock-man, because he believed in *Him,* Jesus, the Son of the living God. And then He said that on this Rock, on Himself, on whom the rock-man Peter built his faith, He would build His Church. Which, therefore, is this Rock? Undoubtedly He, the Lord Jesus Christ Himself, or, we might also say, the confession of faith in Jesus Christ, which is based on the Word of God, the Gospel of Jesus Christ.

And this is in harmony with the word of Paul 1 Cor. 3, 11: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." And the same apostle says that the Christians are "built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief Corner-stone." Eph. 2, 20. Christ, then, is the Rock; and whoever is built on Him, on His Gospel, whoever firmly adheres to Him and clings to Him, is a rock-man like Peter, a member of Christ's Church, against which the gates of hell shall not prevail.

Prayer.

O dearest Jesus, I heartily rejoice in Thee and know for certain that I am a partaker of Thy grace; for Thou canst not hate Thine own flesh and blood and therefore canst not be wroth with me. Though I am sinful and unholy, I take comfort in Thy holiness and innocence. Though I have offended God with my sins, I know that Thou art the Mediator between God and me, that Thou appeasest His wrath by pointing to Thy meritorious suffering for me, and that Thou wilt save me from all ills that threaten me. Although I have deserved death and damnation, Thou wilt give me life and salvation. Where my Brother, my flesh and blood, reigneth, I, too, hope to be and remain in all eternity. Amen.

Rock of Ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Thee!
Let the water and the blood
From Thy riven side which flowed,
Be of sin the double cure,
Cleanse me from its guilt and power.

130. Jesus Christ Is Also True Man.

The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us. *John 1, 14.*

Whenever we direct our attention to Jesus, we behold a true, natural man. Prophets and apostles describe Him as a man. The Scriptures expressly call Him man. Eighty-four times He is called "the Son of Man" in the New Testament. The Son of God did not assume merely a human *form,* but a human *nature.* He does not only *seem* to be a man, He really *is* a man, like all other men. "He was in the likeness of men," He was like unto us all; He was made our Brother. There was only one thing in which He was not like unto us all: He was without sin.

What humiliation of the eternal Son of God thus to descend to us sinners! What a humiliation of the great God in heaven to abstain from the use of His almighty power, to become man, and even to be a servant of sinful mankind! It was a most wonderful condescension on the part of the eternal Son of God that He should act the part of a man on this earth, that He who is the omnipotent Creator should become a creature and live as a creature!

But it was not for pastime that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world in the form of a servant and had Him become man and humble Himself. There was a purpose to it, and that purpose was that He should show obedience to His heavenly Father, do His heavenly Father's will with regard to everything for which He had sent Him into this world, and that He should lead a life of suffering, which was to terminate in the death on the cross, — and all this for our sakes. He kept for us the Law of God, which we have not kept, and by His suffering and death on the cross He bore the punishment which we have deserved for our sins. He humbled Himself to redeem us sinful creatures and to rescue us from eternal perdition. "Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him!"

Prayer.

O Lord God, heavenly Father, we give Thee thanks that of Thy great goodness and mercy Thou didst suffer Thine only-begotten Son to become incarnate and to redeem us from sin and everlasting death, and we beseech Thee, enlighten our hearts by Thy Holy Spirit that we may evermore with a true heart thank Thee for this Thy grace and comfort ourselves with it in the hours of tribulation and temptation; through the same Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Thou, the Spring of all my comfort,
More than life to me,
Whom have I on earth beside Thee,
Whom in heaven but Thee?
  Savior, Savior, hear my humble cry,
  While on others Thou art calling,
  Do not pass me by.

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131. Christ Is God and Man in One Person.

Whose are the fathers and of whom, as concerning the flesh, Christ came, who is over all, God blessed forever. Amen. *Rom. 9, 5.*

Every creature has but one nature. An animal has an animal nature. Man has a human nature. An angel has an angelic nature. But our Lord Jesus Christ has *two* natures, the divine nature and the human nature.

Yet we do not believe in two Lords Jesus Christ, the one being God, the other man, but we confess: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is *my Lord.*" There is but *one* Lord Jesus Christ. He is God and man in one person, the God-man. "In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead *bodily,*" says St. Paul, Col. 2, 9. The divine nature and the human nature of Christ are united in one divine-human Person.

The two natures of Christ are not mixed in Him; they are, and always remain, entirely different, as God is different from man. His divine nature is not created; it is purely spiritual, eternal, omnipotent, omniscient, omnipresent; and it is holiness, justice, mercy, and truth itself. His human nature, however, is created, is temporal, and has body and soul; it is neither omnipotent nor omniscient nor omnipresent; and what it has in itself of holiness and other goodness it has only because God has created it after His own image. Note this difference between the divine and the human nature of Christ. You must not think that the two are mixed, as if Christ were a being midway between God and man. No; these two natures in Christ are so intimately united that the man Jesus is God and the eternal Son of God is man. Isaiah calls the child born unto us "The Mighty God." John says: "The Word," the eternal Son of God, "was made flesh." In Christ, therefore, the properties of each nature are common to the whole Person.

Just such a Savior we needed. As the God-man He could appease the wrath of God in our stead.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou art God and man in one person; Thou art seated upon the throne of glory, at the right hand of the majesty of God; Thou hearest our prayers and art with us always, even unto the end of the world. We return unto Thee honor and praise for Thy great love to us. We thank Thee for Thy Word, by which Thou givest us the knowledge of Thee. And we beseech Thee, let our knowledge be not only of the head, but also and above all of the heart. Amen.

Let us all with gladsome voice
Praise the God of heaven,
Who, to bid our hearts rejoice,
His own Son hath given.

To this vale of tears He comes,
Here to serve in sadness,
That with Him in heaven's fair homes
We may reign in gladness.

132. Christ's Human Nature Partakes of the Majesty of His Divine Nature.

The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.
1 John 1, 7.

When Christ shed His blood according to His human nature, it received all-sufficient saving power from His divine nature. According to His divine nature Jesus has life in Himself "as the Father hath life in Himself." Now, that which constitutes the very nature of God, having life in Himself, is given to Christ as the Son of Man. In Him the attributes, or properties, of each nature are common to the whole Person.

The human nature of Christ partakes of the majesty of the divine nature. He says: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." He promised: "Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them." He does not say: My divinity shall be there; He says: I that speak to you, I, Jesus of Nazareth, am there. To Nicodemus He said: "No man hath ascended up to heaven but He that came down from heaven, even the Son of Man, which is in heaven." While He was speaking with Nicodemus, He, the Son of Man, His humanity, was also in heaven.

The humanity of Jesus Christ, received into unity with the person of the Son of God, is permeated by the divinity and is become omnipotent and omnipresent and possesses all divine glory which also shone forth from His countenance on the Mount of Transfiguration. Let me illustrate. Iron in its own nature is dark and cold, having neither light nor heat; but if permeated by fire, it becomes shining and burning; yea, a lump of it heated red-hot is all fire. And yet it remains iron. Thus the divine nature of Christ, permeating His human nature, communicates all its attributes to it. Therefore our Savior was surely able to redeem us.

Prayer.

O Christ Jesus, Thou eternal Son of God, we honor, praise, and magnify Thee that Thou didst become our Brother and Emmanuel, that is, God with us; that out of unspeakable love to us Thou hast befriended us and clothed Thyself with the garb of our flesh and blood. Thou hast humiliated Thyself in order to exalt us; Thou didst come down upon this earth that we might go up to Thee in heaven. Thou didst lie in the manger in abject poverty and didst suffer on the cross, so that, having enriched our souls, Thou couldst make us great lords in Thy heavenly mansions. Praise be to Thy holy name! Amen.

Shall we still dread God's displeasure,
Who to save Freely gave
Us His dearest treasure?
To redeem us He hath given
His own Son From the throne
Of His might in heaven.

133. Both Natures in Christ Active in the Work of Our Redemption.

Ye killed the Prince of Life. *Acts 3, 15.*

Both natures of Christ took part in the work of our redemption. To be born, to suffer poverty, cruel torment, crucifixion, and death, to be buried, is proper to the human nature. But Scripture ascribes all this not merely to the human nature of Christ, but to His whole Person.

Paul, for instance, writes: "They have crucified the Lord of Glory"; and Peter said to the Jews: "Ye have killed the Prince of Life." Christ's divine nature could not, of course, suffer and die; but when He, the Son of God, was made flesh, He obtained a mortal body, and when He, this God-man, was crucified and died, not a mere man died, but one who was also "the Lord of Glory," "the Prince of Life." On Calvary the blood of the Son of God was shed. When God had become man, it became possible and a fact that God purchased the Church *"with His own blood,"* as we read Acts 20, 28. Christ's blood is God's own blood, because Christ is God.

Some, indeed, arguing from the dictates of reason, would here say that only the *man* Christ Jesus was crucified and not the Son of *God,* because God cannot be crucified, nor can He die. But with the same right we could argue that the soul of Jesus was not crucified, but only the body, because the nails driven through His hands and feet could not pierce His soul. In spiritual things we must beware of following the deceitful argumentation of our reason. We must abide by the Scriptures, which clearly say that both natures in Christ were active in the work of our redemption. When the body of Jesus was crucified, His soul, too, was crucified, because the soul was in the body; and when the *man* Christ was crucified, the whole person of the Son of God was crucified; because His divine and His human nature were united when He was made flesh.

Oh, what blessed assurance this doctrine gives to our faith! Jesus is God Himself, and therefore His sacrifice was and is of infinite and eternal value. Hold to Him, and you are saved.

Prayer.

O faithful Savior, how can we sufficiently thank, praise, and honor Thee for the love and mercy which Thou hast shown us?

As long as we live, we will confess Thee the patient Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world. Our sins are among those which Thou didst bear; we, too, caused Thy death by our vain conversation received by tradition from our fathers. Though this knowledge is humiliating to us, cause it to become fruitful to us by granting us faith in Thee as our Redeemer and by letting the fact that Thou didst suffer such untold agony to atone for our sins be a warning to us against sinning wilfully and thus crucifying Thee anew. And finally give us strength to conquer death by virtue of Thy atoning death. Amen.

O Jesus blest!
My Help and Rest!
With tears I now entreat Thee:
Make me love Thee to the last,
Till in heaven I greet Thee.

134. Jesus, the Mediator Between God and Men.

There is one God and one Mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus. *1 Tim. 2, 5.*

God and man were at variance with each other. There was a partition between God and man, so that they could not come together or agree. Because by sin God and man were estranged from each other, as it is written: "Your iniquities have separated between you and your God, and your sins have hid His face from you that He will not hear," a mediator was necessary who would reconcile offended divine Justice and obtain a gracious hearing for the sinner. Without a mediator there can be no reconciliation between God and man. Without a mediator the partition-wall must remain forever.

But prompted by His everlasting mercy, the triune and only wise God took counsel with Himself; and He found a way to provide a Mediator who was both capable of taking the place of man and able to make satisfaction to infinite Justice. Our Mediator is the Only-begotten of the Father, who was made flesh. Because He is God and man in one person, therefore the shedding of His blood and the laying down of His life is an atonement of unbounded and never-ending value, by which the debt of sin has been truly and fully paid.

God was in no way bound to make peace with us; according to right and justice He might have banished us from His countenance forever. But He had no pleasure in the death of sinners and resolved to become His own Peacemaker. Therefore God the Son was made flesh that He might act as Mediator. Jesus Christ, the God-man, is the Mediator between God and man.

Now apply these glorious tidings to your own person and learn to say: Oh, what a merciful God! I am saved, my transgression is forgiven, my sin is covered, I have been reconciled to God in Christ, my Mediator and Redeemer. Jesus, Thou art mine forever — heaven is mine!

Prayer.

O Thou Lord of Glory, what return am I able to render for all the mercies and all the truth, which Thou hast shown unto me? How can I, poor, needy mortal, ever recompense Thee? O Lord, this debt must ever remain unpaid. But since I have not wherewith to pay my debt, I render Thee most heartfelt thanks for all Thy mercy towards me, and I will praise and magnify Thy name from henceforth and even forevermore. In Thee, O Lord, do I hope; let me never be confounded! Amen.

Other refuge have I none,
Hangs my helpless soul on Thee;
Leave, ah, leave me not alone,
Still support and comfort me!
All my trust on Thee is stayed,
All my help from Thee I bring;
Cover my defenseless head
With the shadow of Thy wing.

135. Jesus, Our Treasure and Pearl of Great Price.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto treasure hid in a field.... Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went and sold all that he had and bought it. *Matt. 13, 44—46.*

God has given man a treasure which satisfies the demands of the lost. He sent His only-begotten Son into the world to become man's Substitute. Christ's fulfilment of the Law, His suffering and death, are the foundation of the Church, of the kingdom of God on earth. This is what renders the treasure so costly. If one realizes this, is it a wonder that he will go and sell all that he has and buy the field in which this valuable treasure can be found?

Is there anything more precious and joyous than to know that debts which would have rendered us forever unhappy have been paid? In the payment of these awful debts consists the great glory of God's kingdom.

"Again, the kingdom of heaven is like unto a merchantman seeking goodly pearls." The value of the pearls was the cause for searching. He who does not search will not find. Many so-called Christians do not seek because they have not yet realized the dreadfulness of their sinful condition. The contrite sinner is in earnest about his soul's relief and continues his search for the costly Pearl, the Lord Jesus Christ, in whom alone he can find pardon for his sins. Christ is the Pearl of great price in which our great happiness is centered. He who has Christ has more than the value of this whole world. The Scriptures reveal to us Christ, our Savior, and therefore they are able to make us wise unto salvation. That is why we search.

The more we search, the more shall we be able to appreciate the value of the costly Pearl. The man who possesses all this world and has not Jesus is of all creatures on earth the most miserable; and the man who possesses nothing of this world, but has Jesus, is the richest of all men and the most happy of God's creatures. He possesses the priceless Pearl, and therefore he is inexpressibly happy.

Prayer.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, Thou art my only Strength, my Help, my greatest Treasure and precious Pearl of great price. Direct my mind and my desire, I pray Thee, to fear and love Thee. Hide me in Thy loving bosom that in my distress I may submit my will to Thee and trust in Thee alone, since no man can counsel or save me. Thou art the true Physician of all sick, the true Comfort of every seeking soul. Do Thou comfort and save me. I trust in Thee. Amen.

Jesus, priceless Treasure,
Source of purest pleasure,
Truest Friend to me:
Long my heart hath panted
Till it well-nigh fainted,
Thirsting after Thee.
Thine I am, O spotless Lamb!
I will suffer naught to hide Thee,
Ask for naught beside Thee.

136. The Work of Redemption through Christ.

Christ hath redeemed us. *Gal. 3, 13.*

The Second Article of our Christian Creed treats of redemption. Already in the heading of the Second Article, as also in many passages of Holy Writ, the work of our Lord Jesus Christ is called "redemption." For this purpose did the Son of God assume the human nature: to redeem and save sinful mankind. "The Son of Man is come to save that which was lost."

This our redemption through Christ and its blessed fruit are summed up in the explanation of the Second Article: "I believe that Jesus Christ *is my Lord.*" Why is Jesus Christ here called our *Lord?* Not only because of His eternal divinity, but also because of His humanity, yea, chiefly and with emphasis because of His true human nature and His human name "Jesus" is the Messiah in the Scriptures called our "Lord," — and that for the sake of our redemption. Yea, because He has redeemed us, purchased and won us with His holy, precious blood, therefore He now is our Lord, therefore we now are His own and live under Him in His kingdom. Who was our lord by nature without Christ? No one else than the prince of this world, the devil. It is he who, after the Fall, has brought all mankind into his kingdom and power, so that all men are by nature, by their natural birth, the subjects and prisoners of Satan. And therein consists the work of redemption through Christ, that He has bruised the head of the Serpent, that He has destroyed the works of the devil. The devil, therefore, is no longer our lord, — for he has been conquered and subdued, and our captivity is led captive, — but now Christ is our Lord, unto whom all power is given in heaven and in earth. As Lord over all He now sits at the right hand of God and rules with divine power and majesty in His kingdom, and especially does He govern and protect His Church, of which He is the Head. Through faith we are His own and citizens in His kingdom, blessed children of God. Our Redeemer is our Lord.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, as of old Thou didst manifest Thyself as the Son of God and Redeemer of the whole world, so even now Thou causest to be made known in all places the glad tidings of our redemption. As there is salvation in none other except in Thee, we beseech Thee, grant us Thy Holy Spirit to witness of

Thee, that we may know Thee to be our only Savior and in true faith yield our hearts to Thee and praise Thee for Thy goodness all our days. We come to Thee with a trusting heart. Thou art our only Hope and Refuge. Hear us, Lord Jesus! Amen.

Nay, too closely am I bound
Unto Him by hope forever;
Faith's strong hand the Rock hath found,
Grasped it, and will leave it never,
Not the ban of death can part
From its Lord the trusting heart.

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137. His Life of Deep Humiliation.

He made Himself of no reputation and took upon Him the form of a servant and was made in the likeness of men; and being found in fashion as a man, He humbled Himself. *Phil. 2, 7. 8.*

According to His human nature, Christ did not always and not fully use the divine majesty communicated to His human nature. "He humbled Himself and became obedient." His whole life on earth was one continual self-denial. As a child He grew in stature and in knowledge. That is as much a revelation as any other. Nor does it detract from a true and proper conception of divinity. For if one would make himself like unto his brethren, he should begin where they began, and in everything but sin should rise with them, step by step, all the way up. Following Christ from His childhood on, we find that He lived a hard life. Poverty and hardships manifold were His lot until His death upon the cross. Persecuted by King Herod, the Christ-child had to flee to Egypt.

Later on His home was in Nazareth, a poor, despised village, where He served His foster-father, a poor carpenter. His lot was a hard one; He led the strenuous life of a poor workingman; He was brought up under poor and stressed circumstances. And He remained poor.

At the very beginning of His public ministry He was tempted by Satan, and throughout the following three years He was hated, despised, and persecuted by His own people. He humbled Himself by taking upon Himself the form of a servant. He came to serve us. He was equal with God, but did not make a boast, a display, of it; He did not manifest it at all times as He might have done. He humbled Himself. Voluntarily, for our sakes, He forewent high stations and honors which He rightfully might have claimed and enjoyed, being equal with God, very God Himself.

Ponder, dear Christian, how much your beloved Savior has endured for you; how much He has suffered to redeem you, a lost and condemned creature! Thank Him for His life of deep humiliation and permit Him to draw you unto Himself; and then cling to Him in life and in death.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou Son of the living God, we thank Thee that Thou didst submit to the hardships and humiliations of human life, to endure hunger and thirst, to go about as a king in the guise of a beggar. Let our hearts be filled with wonder and admiration at Thy unspeakable love to us poor sinners. Grant us grace to believe firmly that by Thy obedience Thou hast delivered us from the wrath of God and by Thy humiliation hast raised us to a high estate. Let this mind be in us which was in Thee, that we ever follow Thee in sincere humility, obedience, and patience. Amen.

As His coming was in peace,
Noiseless, full of gentleness,
Let the same mind be in me
That was ever found in Thee.

138. He was Made under the Law.

He was made under the Law to redeem them that were under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons. *Gal. 4, 5.*

Jesus was not under the Law. He is Lord of all. And yet He placed Himself under the Law and was obedient to the Law for our sakes. He made the beginning to atone for us by shedding His precious blood on the day of His circumcision. A few weeks later He was presented to the Lord in the Temple, and the sacrifice of purification was brought for Him. He put Himself under the Law, as though He were a sinner like all the rest of the children of men. And this He did for us, that He might redeem us.

Jesus is the Substitute of the sinful human race, who "was made" under the Law for our sakes, fulfilling for us the Law's demands, that we might not be eternally condemned by the Law, which we have not fulfilled, but live before God forever. It is clear, to obtain salvation, we must be freed from the bondage and curse of the Law and from the punishment which we deserve on account of our sins. Now, if you receive Jesus as your Savior and believe that He has kept the Law for you, fulfilled all the divine commandments in your place, and has perfectly atoned for all your sins by His painful suffering and bitter death, you will be free from the curse and bondage of the Law. The Law will no longer condemn you because you trust in Him who has fulfilled it for you.

"That we might receive the adoption of sons." The blessedness of this sonship manifests itself daily in the life of a Christian. If Satan would terrify the Christian on account of his sins, the child of God answers: As long as I was without Christ, you could thus accuse me, but since, through Christ, God is my reconciled and loving Father, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea, rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God and also makes intercession for us. In Christ we have a city of refuge, fleeing to which we are safe from the condemnation of the Law.

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, we pray Thee so to enlighten our hearts that in the mirror of Thy Law we may duly perceive our many and great sins. But grant also that we may ever in true faith lay hold of the all-sufficient merit and obedience of Thy dear Son and thus learn to trust in Thy grace and obtain that peace which the world cannot give. We beseech Thee, create in us a broken and contrite heart that we may sincerely lament our sins and obtain from Thee full remission for them, for the sake of Jesus, our Ransom. Amen.

From heaven descending to fulfil
The mandates of His Father's will,
For captives He the ransom pays,
For lawless man the Law obeys.

139. Christ's Innocent Suffering and Death.

He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon Him, and with His stripes we are healed. *Is. 53, 5.*

The Jews took Jesus to the Roman governor and prevailed on him to put Jesus to death. Having condemned Him under a false pretense in their own council, they brought another false accusation against Him before Pilate. They accused Him of attempting to instigate a revolt against the Romans and to set Himself up as king. The chief priests well knew that there was not a shadow of truth in this accusation. To Pilate also the falsity of this accusation was well known, and he washed his hands to show that he did not want the guilt of condemning this innocent man to rest on his conscience.

But, however innocent Jesus was, all were against Him. One of His own disciples betrayed Him, another denied Him. And not only men were against Him; God, too, was against Him; He smote Him, and while He was hanging upon the cross, He also, for a time, forsook Him. The wrath and curse of God resting on His soul caused Him infinitely more anguish and torment than all the tortures which men could inflict upon Him. Of this torment the prophet Isaiah said: "It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief." All other pain He could bear without a groan. The scoffing and mocking of His merciless enemies could only move Him to pray for them. The torments inflicted upon His body could not open His mouth; He was dumb as a sheep before his shearers. Even when the sorrows of hell compassed Him about and the ravenings of the devil terrified His soul, He did not remonstrate, as long as He could press all the closer to His heavenly Father's bosom. But when even His Father forsook Him, it approached the limit of endurance for Him. He complained: "My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?" Yes, why?

Prayer.

Lord Jesus Christ, Thou innocent Lamb of God, without blemish and without spot, Thou didst suffer for us, the Just for the unjust. Thou didst not shrink from the shameful death of a criminal in order to gain for us the favor of God. For our disobedience Thou wast obedient unto death, even the death of the cross. Thy precious blood cleanses us from all sin. Thy death secures us against eternal death. Praise and glory be to Thy holy name forever and ever! Amen.

Stricken, smitten, and afflicted,
See Him dying on the tree!
'Tis the Christ, by man rejected;
Yes, my soul, 'tis He! 'tis He!
'Tis the long-expected Prophet,
David's Son, yet David's Lord;
Proofs I see sufficient of it:
'Tis the true and faithful Word.

140. Christ Suffered and Died as Our Substitute.

He hath made Him to be sin for us who knew no sin, that we might be made the righteousness of God in Him. *2 Cor. 5, 21.*

He who was Innocence itself was "made to be sin." This expression makes Christ and sin one thing. Because He was made sin, He had to bear it and to suffer the punishments of sin. To the Galatians, St. Paul writes: "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the Law, being made a curse for us." So completely was sin accounted unto Him as to make Him a curse. So truly was sin upon Him that it caused the shedding of His blood. So fully were our sins made His own that they stung Him to death.

He stepped into our place, becoming the sinner's Substitute. The sins of all mankind were laid upon His shoulders; they were imputed to Him as though they had been His own sins. Faultless, perfect, and holy though He was, He offered Himself to be punished for all the transgressions of the world. He bore our guilt; He paid the incalculable debt which we had contracted; He suffered all the anguish and pain which eternal Justice had threatened to mete out to us as the wages of sin. For our sakes He submitted to the disgrace of being condemned as a criminal. He "was wounded for *our* transgressions. He was bruised for *our* iniquities," and eternal Justice entitles the world to the plea, "Not guilty!" The *world* is redeemed. Christ acquired a *universal* justification. "As by the offense of one, judgment came unto *all men* to condemnation, even so by the righteousness of One the free gift came upon *all men* unto justification of life." Rom. 5, 18.

But this universal justification must be appropriated by the individual sinner. In order to be justified, acquitted, found not guilty, it is necessary that we interchange places with Jesus Christ. By love He took our place and died; by faith we take His place and live. Our sins were imputed to Him; His righteousness is imputed to us through faith.

Prayer.

My dear Lord Jesus, Thou spotless Lamb of God, who wast falsely accused, beaten with many stripes, condemned to death, nailed to the cross, Thy hands and Thy feet cruelly pierced; yea, every member of Thy holy body wounded, — when I behold all this, I see in it nothing but *my* sin, guilt, and iniquity, which has driven Thee to this, and on account of which Thou didst subject Thyself to all this anguish, suffering, and pain. The Innocent paid for the guilty, the Godly atoned for the guilt of the ungodly. Let me never forget this Thy great love. Amen.

I lay in fetters groaning,
Thou com'st to set me free;
I stood, my shame bemoaning,
Thou com'st to honor me;
A glory Thou dost give me,
A treasure safe on high,
That will not fail nor leave me
As earthly riches fly.

141. Ponder the Immeasurable Love of God to Us Damnable Sinners!

In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent His only-begotten Son into the world that we might live through Him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that He loved us and sent His Son to be the propitiation for our sins.
1 John 4, 9. 10.

In the Bible we are told of the great love of God. Mention is made of it on every page. "God is Love," says St. John, and then he adds that God showed His love towards us by sending His Son into the world. And our Savior says: "For God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son." These words are immeasurable, infinite. The love of God in Jesus has in all ages been the key-note of all true preaching in the Church of God; it is the very sum and substance of the Bible.

So great is the love of God that it embraces the whole world, the world of sinners. Yea, God commendeth His love towards us in that Christ died for us while we were yet sinners. When the Father delivered up His Son into the shameful death of the cross for us, what thoughts could He have had towards us but thoughts of infinite love?

And this salvation which the Son of God purchased for us through His bloody death is offered to us freely, as it is written: "All have sinned and come short of the glory of God; being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." Surely God, who sacrificed His own Son and offers heaven and all salvation to us freely, making no condition and asking no price, has thoughts of immeasurable love towards us. Our dear Redeemer Jesus sacrificed His life for us; and as St. John says:

"Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends." This is what the Son of God did for us all. He laid down His life for us. Oh, how great, then, is the love of God towards us! He says by the mouth of the prophet Jeremiah: "I have loved thee with an *everlasting* love." These words reveal to us the innermost thoughts of God, whose love towards us is immeasurable — everlasting.

Prayer.

O Thou Son of the living God, how great is Thy love and mercy towards us men! What hast Thou not done and suffered in order to redeem me, a poor, lost sinner, and save me from death and eternal damnation! I have transgressed, and Thou art stricken; I have sinned, and Thou didst make amends. I have been disobedient, and because of my disobedience Thou must endure this anguish and distress. Thou hast laid down Thy life for us. Amen.

'Tis done; the precious ransom's paid;
"Receive my soul!" He cries;
See how He bows His sacred head!
He bows His head and dies.

But soon He breaks death's envious chain,
In glory full to shine.
O Lamb of God! was ever pain,
Was ever love, like Thine?

142. Whom Did Christ Redeem?

This is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. *1 Tim. 1, 15.*

Jesus Christ came to save sinners. What sinners are meant? What are their names, and how are they described? By the word "sinner" every man, woman, or child is meant, every one who has a soul to lose and to save. "There is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good and sinneth not." They are all gone aside; *all men* are sinners. And Christ Jesus gave Himself a ransom for *all*. And the Savior addresses all, saying: "Come unto Me, *all* ye that labor and are heavy laden." Every man is meant. No one ever has reason to say that Christ has slighted him. Christ's invitation means: No matter how long you may have sinned; no matter how often you may have sneered at My gracious invitation; no matter how black your record may be, — *you* are meant.

Christ came to save sinners. He came to save *every* sinner. "All" excludes none, but includes every one. Men are lost only if they will not have the salvation Christ has procured for them. He has redeemed all sinners. They are lost only if they exclude themselves by unbelief. Do not think that your sins are too many and too great to be forgiven. Paul does not only say that Christ came to save sinners, but He adds: "Of whom I am chief." And he was a great sinner. He had blasphemed Christ. He had persecuted the disciples of Christ. Yet this enormous sinner was right in saying that Christ came into the world to save also Him, the chief of sinners. Christ came to save sinners, none excepted. In Him there is salvation for all.

Already at the birth of Christ the angel said that the Christmas-tidings of great joy should be "to *all* people." Trust in this faithful saying and accept the Savior as your own. Rejoice in your Savior, believe in your Redeemer, cling to the Lord Jesus Christ, and peace and salvation will be yours.

Prayer.

Dear heavenly Father, grant me grace to look upon Christ Crucified, who was delivered also for my offenses and was raised again for my justification. Open to me, as a safe refuge, His bleeding wounds, in which so many a poor sinner has found comfort and salvation. Create also in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from Thy presence and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. Do not let me perish under the load of my sin or despair, but do Thou turn to me and be gracious unto me. Look upon my misery and distress and save me. Amen.

Delay not, delay not, O sinner, draw near,
The waters of life are now flowing for thee.
No price is demanded, the Savior is here;
Redemption is purchased, salvation is free.

143. Christ Redeemed Us from All Sins.

The blood of Jesus Christ, His Son, cleanseth us from all sin.
1 John 1, 7.

Is it clear, and is it certain above any shadow of doubt, that we are redeemed from sin, from all sins? It surely is. If any Bible-truth is a faithful saying and worthy of all acceptation, it is this. "Christ His own self bare our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness; by whose stripes ye were healed." "And ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins."

Such passages must convince us that we are redeemed from sin. But if Scripture says: "From *all* sins," it means the sins of the whole world. Also in this sense you must say: Christ has redeemed me from *all* sins, that is, not only from "my" sins which, according to your own imagination, may be only a few; no, from *all* sins, from the smallest to the largest, the germ of all of which is in our corrupt nature; all these He has borne and redeemed you from them. This is saying the same as when we confess: "Before God we should plead guilty of all sins." It is the teaching of Scripture and our Lutheran Confessions that in our corrupt nature we have all sins. Of no sin we can say: Of this I am free; I have not done this; here I have kept the divine commandment; from this sin Christ did not have to redeem me. That is the language of the Pharisee. A Lutheran Christian confesses with Paul that he is the chief of sinners, that is, before God he pleads guilty of all sins.

From all sins your Savior had to redeem also *you* and — did redeem you. "The blood of Jesus Christ, God's Son, cleanseth us from *all* sin." Thank God for having "forgiven you *all* trespasses." Col. 2, 13. Not a single sin does God lay to your charge, but all your trespasses have been forgiven because your Savior Jesus has died and shed His precious blood for you. What more, then, do you need to make your happiness complete? For where there is forgiveness of sins, there is also life and salvation.

Prayer.

Dear Father in heaven, we thank Thee from our inmost hearts that Thou hast sent us Thy dear Son to redeem us from all our sins. The object of Thy terrible wrath against sin was only One, and that One is He who has become our Champion that He might be our Savior. Let us, then, listen to every word of the sweet Gospel of salvation lest anything escape us. Open Thou our eyes and our hearts that not one word may be said in vain. Let us press close and embrace the dear feet that were pierced for us, and let us wet them with our tears — not with tears of sympathy for Him who needs none and wants none from us, but with tears of genuine repentance for our sins. Amen.

Dear dying Lamb, Thy precious blood
Shall never lose its power,
Till all the ransomed Church of God
Be saved to sin no more.

144. Christ Redeemed Us from Death.

Christ hath abolished death and hath brought life and immortality to light. *2 Tim. 1, 10.*

Conscience tells man that with death all is not over, but that there is a retribution after death at the hands of divine Justice. This is what man fears most. And the shackles of this fear of death he could not shake off. He was thus subject to bondage all his lifetime.

But Christ came and redeemed us from death. How? By His own death on the cross. Yes, Christ must die, the Sinless for the sinners, the Innocent for the guilty. He must pay the wages of sin, which is death, in our place. As the Scriptures say, 2 Cor. 5, 15: "He died for all," that is, in the place of all. He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities. Thus did Christ, by His death, "destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil"; thus did He spoil the devil and take his power over man from him by His death; and thus did He deliver man from the terrible fear that death will plunge him into eternal death and everlasting torment; and thus He robbed death of its sting.

The monster Death lies vanquished, helpless. Or do you doubt this? Do you doubt the power of Jesus to prevail against death? Look what He did at Nain, with the daughter of Jairus, at the tomb of Lazarus! At one word of Jesus the dead were restored to life.

What power of Jesus! Death must crouch and shrink before Him. Upon His command death must deliver up his prey. However, the power of Jesus over death is nowhere so conclusively shown as in the personal combat of Jesus with the Prince of Terrors, when He Himself entered the dark chambers of death. There the fierce battle was fought with death. Death endeavored with all his strength to hold Jesus in his bonds, but in vain. The Lord's Anointed did not see corruption. He showed Himself the Conqueror of death. Death was overcome. You have been delivered from its power.

Prayer.

We thank Thee, O dearest Lord Jesus, that Thou hast delivered us from death. Thou hast powerfully subdued the last enemy of the fallen human race. Oh, let us fully comprehend and appreciate this great benefit. Let us not refuse to be free. Let us not neglect to appropriate this imperishable gift and fruit of Thy redemption to ourselves by a firm faith. Help us, furthermore, that on this and all our days we may be found in Christian readiness, as we do not know when Thou wilt come or in what place or manner we may be summoned, that we may enter into eternal bliss. Amen.

Be Thou my Consolation
And Shield when I must die;
Remind me of Thy Passion
When my last hour draws nigh.
My eyes shall then behold Thee,
Upon Thy cross shall dwell,
My heart by faith enfold Thee.
Who dieth thus, dies well.

145. Christ Redeemed Us from the Power of the Devil.

For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil. *1 John 3, 8.*

Had Christ not redeemed us from the power of the devil, the work of redemption would not be perfect. But what does Scripture say? It says that just for this purpose Christ came into the world, to destroy the works of the devil. He became man "that through death He might destroy him that had the power of death." While, therefore, it is said of the unbelievers that the devil has his work in them, Scripture says of the Christians that, by the power of Christ's redemption, God has delivered them from the "power of darkness."

What is meant when Scripture speaks of "the power of darkness"? What is *the power of the devil?* This expression is to teach us the great strength of the devil and his evil spirits. St. Luke compares the devil with "a strong man armed"; St. Peter calls him "a roaring lion"; St. Paul describes the evil spirits as "principalities, powers, and the rulers of the darkness of this world." Foremost, the leader of the host, is the Prince of Darkness. Around him, as their mighty captain, are legions of lesser evil spirits. They are now most bitterly and irreconcilably opposed to everything that stands in connection with the Redeemer and His redeemed. Therefore the great power of the devil is felt especially by the Christians. And the more we grow in faith and sanctification, the greater the gifts of the Spirit, the higher our rank in the kingdom of God which the grace of God bestows upon us, the deeper is our experience of the power of the devil and his fiery darts.

Indeed, not in vain does Scripture speak of the *power* of the devil. But just as sure and true it is that Christ has redeemed us from his power. The devil has no more claim upon us; he is no longer our master, but the Lord Jesus is our kind and merciful King, who has established His throne in our hearts. And in our dear Lord and Savior we have everything to make our happiness complete. The devil can no longer accuse us, and we can victoriously withstand his temptations.

Prayer.

O Lord, almighty God and heavenly Father, shield me, I pray Thee, under the almighty wings of Thy grace, against the Evil Foe, who goeth about as a roaring lion, seeking to devour me. Graciously protect me that I may rest securely under the shadow of Thy grace and goodness, and the Evil Foe may not draw nigh unto me and harm me. Oh, how cordial is Thy love, how fatherly the care Thou bestowest on me, a poor sinner, having so graciously protected me all my days, from my tender youth to the present moment, against the manifold wiles of the devil, from whose power Jesus has redeemed me. Continue to do so, I beseech Thee, for Thy name's sake. Amen.

Forth, behold, the Savior goeth
Who the foe, Sin and woe,
Death and hell o'erthroweth.
God is man, man to deliver,
His dear Son Now is one
With our blood forever.

146. Wherewith Did Christ Redeem You?

Ye were redeemed with the precious blood of Christ, as of a Lamb without blemish and without spot. *1 Pet. 1, 19.*

You were bought with a price. Christ paid for your release, bought you, and set you free. And what a price He paid! A thousand dollars? More. A million? More. What was the price? That which is more precious than all the world's gold and silver and gems; the price was His own blood, His life, the life of the Son of the Most High. It was the blood of God. Redeemed with the blood of God, you are redeemed indeed.

Christ's blood and His vicarious suffering is the only cause, foundation, and means of our salvation. This must be emphasized against all such rationalistic talk as if we were not redeemed solely by the blood and death of Christ, but also by His doctrine, His life, and His good example. To be sure, we also need the doctrine and example of Christ; but His bitter suffering and death is the only cause and means of our salvation. This must also be emphasized against the opinion of the enthusiasts, as if not the Christ *for us,* that is, the Christ who has shed His blood for us, were the main and only cause of our redemption and salvation, but rather the Christ *in us,* that is, the Christ who lives in our hearts through faith, renewing and sanctifying us. No, the Lutheran Church knows of only one means of redemption — the sacrifice of Christ on the cross. This is confirmed by Christ, our Lord, Himself, who said that He came *to give His life* a ransom for many. And all the prophets and apostles, with one accord, proclaim this message to a lost world. Also the hosts of heaven give glory and honor and thanks to the Lamb that has redeemed us to God by His blood. Our Lutheran Church, too, voices this truth, that Christ has redeemed, purchased, and won us with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. The apostle's curse falls upon all those who look upon their own good works as a cause of their salvation.

Prayer.

Merciful, heavenly Father, blot out my transgressions according to Thy great mercy, which is greater than the sins of all mankind. Purge me with hyssop and wash me with the pure blood of Thy Son, which He shed upon the cross. Let me always remember that His blood is the only foundation of my eternal bliss, the price with which He bought me. Let me beware of robbing Him of the honor of being my only Savior, as well as of this honor, that His blood is the sole cause of my salvation. And now I belong to Him; I am His own, His property, since He has bought me with that price. Dear Lord Jesus, let me be Thy own forever. I come to Thee just as I am — do not cast me out. I know Thou wilt not do it. Amen.

Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

147. Jesus Is Our Good Shepherd.

I am the Good Shepherd; the Good Shepherd giveth His life for the sheep. *John 10, 11.*

The whole human race may be compared to a flock of sheep. Jesus is the Good Shepherd of that flock. He bought that flock with the price of His own precious blood. He is the Savior of all men. I am no hireling, says Jesus. I am the good Shepherd that gives His life for the sheep.

To understand the meaning of these words, we must remember that by nature all men are as lost sheep. Our first parents were seduced to sin and fell a prey to Satan. Since the Fall all men are born in sin, and not a soul is by nature born into the sheepfold of the Lord. By nature we do not follow our Good Shepherd. By nature we are all like sheep gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way. And the wolf is lurking. Satan intends to get eternal possession of all men. But, behold! the Good Shepherd came. The Son of God appeared on this earth to deliver us from the jaws of the ravening wolf. But oh, how hard the Good Shepherd had to fight that He might deliver the lost sheep! He gave His life for the sheep. In our stead, for us, He suffered and died.

That is what the Lord Jesus Christ did for us as our Good Shepherd. He not only put His life at stake, but He actually gave His life. Oh, how Satan must have triumphed when our Shepherd was dying! The whole flock seemed to be his. But things turned out contrary to Satan's expectation. For, behold! Christ rose again from the dead. His death procured the sheep's life; His blood-shedding, their deliverance; His sacrifice, their liberty.

The risen Savior has instituted the office of the ministry. Thus the sheep even to-day hear His voice. *The voice of the Good Shepherd is the Gospel of Jesus Christ.* If we do not hear His voice and consequently are lost, we must lay it to our own charge. But the Good Shepherd seeks the lost sheep. Let Him not seek in vain.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus, my Good Shepherd, I surrender entirely to Thy pleasure; shape my destiny as accords with Thy will and as best advances my soul's salvation. Into Thy hands do I commit myself; behold, Thou hast graven me upon the palms of Thy hands; no one shall pluck me out of Thy hands, for I am of the people of Thy pasture and the sheep of Thy hand. Let me never stray from the fold to the ways of error and sin; and if I do, bring me back to the flock listening to Thy saving voice. Amen.

The Lord my faithful Shepherd is,
And me He safely guideth;
I shall not want, for I am His
Who all things good provideth;
I follow Him, I hear His voice,
In Him, my Lord, I do rejoice:
Blest am I in His keeping.

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148. The Purpose of His Redemption.

Thou wast slain and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood.
Rev. 5, 9.

Christ has redeemed us lost and condemned creatures, purchased and won us from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death. For what purpose? "He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again."

What, then, is the purpose of His redemption? That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness. For this purpose Christ redeemed us. Is it not clear? If a soldier who is in the hands of the enemy is to be liberated, a ransom-price must be paid for him; then he receives a pass and is allowed to return home. Now, all men were in the hands of their hellish enemy. Jesus came and paid a ransom for them, and now we are free. By the Gospel this freedom is not only proclaimed, but also given to us; by the Sacraments it is sealed. The Word and the Sacraments are our divine pass to be presented at the gate of heaven. Now God, through the Gospel, would win our hearts that we may willingly and with ever-increasing joy live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him, willingly and gladly serve Him, as dear children their dear Father. True, this service will be rendered in great weakness by us poor sinners; but the everlasting righteousness and innocence nevertheless is our own unto the daily forgiveness of our sins.

Christ redeemed us "that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him, all the days of our life." And finally He will take us from the Kingdom of Grace into the Kingdom of Glory, where we shall see His great glory and live in eternal joy and bliss and praise Him in all eternity for all the grace which He has bestowed on us. For that purpose He has redeemed us.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, let Thy innocent blood not be shed in vain for me and take not Thy Holy Spirit from me. I thank Thee for all the love with which Thou hast blessed me. For all this I shall serve Thee in holiness and righteousness. Forgive me my indifference and carelessness, my coldness and inactivity, all my past sins and shortcomings. Kindle within me true love towards Thee and a fervent zeal for Thy kingdom. To-day I pledge myself anew to be Thine own, Thine to serve Thee alone, Thine alone and forever. Do not forsake me in the hour of death, but help me through it to life eternal, and let me behold the joy of Thy countenance and Thy glory. Do this for the sake of Thy promise. Amen.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

149. Confessing Christ.

Whosoever shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. *Matt. 10, 32.*

It is our solemn duty to confess Christ as long as we live in this world. To confess Christ means to express plainly and unmistakably by word and deed what we believe concerning Christ. Jesus was true man. This is undisputed. But this is what the world will not believe, that this despised man Jesus, who was laid in the manger, who had not where to lay His head, who shamefully died on the cross, should be the Lord of Glory, the true and everlasting God. This is what the children of this world will not believe. And here we must confess and declare openly before all men that Jesus is more than mortal man, that He is the Lord, before whom all men must bow. This is the principal part of our Christian confession before the world, that we assert and defend Christ's divinity.

To confess Christ also means that we should let the world know where we stand with reference to every doctrine of Holy Writ; for there is not a single doctrine of God's Word that is not intimately connected with Christ Himself. Revealed religion in all its parts treats of Christ, of His person, His office, His work of redemption, His merit, and the application of His benefits to man. The whole Bible is the Book of Christ.

Hence, to confess Christ implies the confession of every doctrine in the Bible, and to deny Christ means to conceal or to reject any truth contained in the Book of our God. It is this conviction that determines the attitude of the Lutheran Church toward all other Christian denominations. We are firmly convinced that we are bound to show by deed as well as by word that we believe every doctrine of Scripture.

Let us finally confess our Christian faith by leading a Christian life; let us walk worthily of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. We must let people know by the manner of our living that the Spirit of Christ is in us. A life of sin and wickedness is, in effect, a denial of Christ. Confess Christ by faithfully hearing His Word.

Prayer.

O dear Lord Jesus, God over all, blessed forever, to Thee I render heartfelt thanks, not only for all Thy great and unspeakable blessings, but above all for this act of unspeakable and ever-adorable love, that Thou didst descend to us poor mortals in this vale of tears from the throne of Thy divine majesty in order to save us lost and condemned sinners. Let me never become guilty of denying Thee. Let me not be indifferent toward that which Thou hast declared to be good or evil. Amen.

Lord God, Thou Holy Spirit,
My Comforter and Guide,
Grant that in Jesus' merit
I always may confide,
Him to the end confessing,
Whom I have known by faith.
Give me Thy constant blessing
And grant a Christian death.

150. We Have Peace with God through Our Lord Jesus Christ.

Therefore, being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ. *Rom. 5, 1.*

Peace with God — what is this peace? It passes all understanding, that is, it is something above human thought, something which even the greatest philosophers of this world cannot attain to, and arrive at, with their mental faculties, something which must be experienced in the heart to know exactly what it is. Peace with God, what a glorious thing! He that has this peace dwelling in his heart is perfectly at rest; nothing can disturb him. He is confident that he is God's dear child, that he has forgiveness of all his sins through his dear Savior Jesus, and that he is the heir of eternal life. The peace with God enables him to say with Paul: "I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord."

This blessed peace Jesus has wrought for us. He says: "Be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." He has overcome it for us. God has given us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. We have peace with God through Him. He told His disciples: "Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you." The peace of this world can give nothing save what we need or desire to have, for this life. But in affliction and in the hour of death the peace of this world cannot help us. When, however, the peace with God is present in the heart, then man is strong, so that adversity cannot crush him and prosperity cannot puff him up. The victory of Christ's death is his through faith; his conscience becomes quiet and is cheered up.

He who is thus consoled and animated by this peace with God can bravely bear and overcome all tribulations, aye, even death itself. Oh, what blessedness to approach death with this peace in the heart!

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, let the daily remembrance of Thy pains and agony assure us again and again that Thou hast made peace with God for us, and let this prompt us to crucify and mortify in ourselves all carnal desires and evil affections of our corrupt old nature. O Lord, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, so keep us, both outwardly and inwardly, that we may be defended against all adversities which may happen to the body and against all evil thoughts which may assault and harm the soul. O Lord, let us taste of that glorious and joyful peace which passeth all understanding! Amen.

No more the foe can harm,
No more of leaguered camp,
And cry of night-alarm,
And need of ready lamp.
My life in Thee, Thy life in me,
Make heaven forever mine.

151. The Joy of a Christian.

Delight thyself also in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. *Ps. 37, 4.*

The joy of the world is, at best, but an imperfect and fleeting thing. Man's desire for happiness can never be perfectly satisfied by the joys of this life. He will always find something lacking to make his joy complete; and generally he will find a few drops of gall in the cup of pleasure, and worldlings tell us that in the midst of their pleasures they can find no real and lasting enjoyment. All the joys of this life pass away. He that is laughing to-day may be weeping to-morrow. Finally death comes and ends all pleasures.

A Christian does not seek his happiness in the things of this life. The true joy of a Christian is of a higher order. The Christian's joy is described in the words of Jesus: "I will see you again, and your heart shall rejoice, and your joy no man taketh from you." The Christian's greatest joy is the possession and enjoyment of Jesus. All the earthly joys are as nothing as compared with this joy in Jesus, our Savior. Not as though forthwith a Christian were entirely beyond the reach of trouble and constantly filled with blissful feeling of Christ's gracious nearness. No, this joy consists in this, that God no longer imputes sin and is well pleased with us. He alone is truly happy who is made sure that his sins are forgiven, that God is his dear Father, that he is God's beloved child, and that heaven is his home.

This joy shall not be taken from us. It shall continue the bright and the dark days of life. Are not, then, the children of God in a truly blessed state? Great is their present blessed condition; but far greater things are in store for them. Therefore: "Rejoice in the Lord alway; and again I say, Rejoice." Let your faith be revived by the joy-inspiring message of the Gospel. Lift up your head in joyful expectation, and let joy prevail.

Prayer.

O benign and merciful Lord, by Thy grace I have lived to see gladness and joy. I thank Thee that Thou hast been my Savior and Redeemer, my Guardian and Keeper, my Comforter and Helper; that Thou hast, as a Father, sustained my body and soul; that Thou hast preserved and protected me, so that I am still living. Awake, O my soul, and rejoice in the Lord, Thy Savior. Do Thou also, O Lord, I humbly beseech Thee, turn Thy face unto me and so guard and guide me that nothing sinful may be in my thoughts, words, or actions. Lead me, Thy needy sheep, in the paths of Thy holy Word, which is my only comfort and the fountain of genuine joy. Amen.

Thou art the Way, the Truth, the Life;
Grant us that way to know,
That Truth to keep, that Life to win,
Whose joys eternal flow.

152. Our Blessed State of Grace.

Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God! *1 John 3, 1.*

In what a jubilant strain St. John describes our blessed state of grace! "Behold," he says, "what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God!" The very simplicity and grandeur of these words grip the heart and fill it with untold rapture. *We* the sons of God! Oh, what blessedness! We the *children of God?* Why, then we belong to God's family; God is our Father; heaven is our home; eternal life is our undisputed inheritance.

Oh, what blessed state of grace! Oh, what precious comfort it imparts! It is a blessed thing to look upon God as a Father, to know that we have been restored to His favor and are entitled to all privileges of a child. And that blessedness is ours. It is a blessed thing amid the trials and difficulties with which the human race has to struggle in this vale of tears to be upheld by the divine promise that the names of His followers are written in heaven, yea, graven upon the very palms of Jesus' hands, from which no one shall pluck them; that He will make all things work together for the welfare of His children and that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which is to be revealed when the children of God shall receive their inheritance. And that blessedness is ours. "Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God" and become the heirs of eternal salvation!

Eternal life is in store for us. Small wonder that John so exultingly cries out: "What manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us!" And he exclaims, "Behold!" O the blessed change! We gain joy for sorrow, life for death. We are God's heirs; God wills to us His glory; we are received into His house of many mansions, where there are pleasures forevermore.

Prayer.

Dear Father in heaven, Thou lovest me, I know, because I love Thy Son, Jesus Christ, my Savior. Trusting in this, I do now confidently pray Thee, do not desert me to my foes, but keep me in the blessed state of grace. Hear me and grant what I ask, not because I am so holy and pious, but because I know that Thou, for Christ's sake, wilt readily give and grant all things to us. I commend myself to Thy divine protection and fatherly blessing for this and all the remaining days of my life. Thy holy angel keep guard over me that the enemy may have no power over me. Do not look upon my own person, but hear me because I lean on Jesus. Amen.

> The soul that on Jesus hath leaned for repose
> I will not, I will not, desert to His foes;
> That soul, though all hell should endeavor to shake,
> I'll never, — no, never, — no, never forsake!

153. Our Heavenly Possession.

He that believeth on the Son hath everlasting life. *John 3, 36.*

Which words of our Lutheran Catechism describe the sweet fruit of Christ's blessed redemption? The words, "That I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him *in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness.*" Let us look at these heavenly benefits and treasures.

In the first place we have *righteousness.* This righteousness of Christ is clean, spotless, without the least deficiency or sin, higher and cleaner than the righteousness of the angels; for it is the righteousness of the Son of God Himself, who is much higher than all creatures. The brilliant light of His perfect righteousness far excels all other glory. And this highest, this glorious, this divine righteousness of the Son of God is the righteousness which is given and imputed to us Christians; the righteousness in which we live in His kingdom, the righteousness which is ours through faith. This righteousness is cleaner than heaven; it covers all our unrighteousness so entirely before God as if it were not there.

Therefore in Christ we also have a perfect *innocence.* We can truly say before the judgment-seat of God: I do not owe anything; all has been settled, the ten thousand talents are paid, every sin is atoned, and in Christ I am made the righteousness of God. Hence I am no more guilty; I am innocent; indeed, I have a perfect innocence. This is the innocence in which every Christian lives in the kingdom of Christ. This perfect innocence of Christ, given and imputed to us, is our heavenly possession.

And from this results the everlasting *blessedness.* Such blessedness is ours already in this life. He that believes in Christ "*hath* everlasting life," — not after years, not after his death, no, *now,* in this life, the moment he believes. Therefore Paul writes to the Ephesians: "By grace are ye saved, through faith"; and to the Romans: "We are saved." As the blessed in heaven are saved, so we, too, are saved; they have salvation by seeing, we have it by faith; yet it is a real possession.

Prayer.

I thank Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, for all the benefits Thou hast showered upon me. Through Thy Word Thou hast conveyed to me spiritual and imperishable gifts; in Holy Baptism, the washing of regeneration, Thou hast given me the assurance that I am a new creature, granting me forgiveness of sin and everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness for an inheritance. By faith and hope I am already in real possession of this glorious inheritance. O the grandeur of that heavenly possession! O the great glory of these treasures! Open my spiritual eyes that I may see and appreciate these Thy blessings. May it not be said of me: "But now they are hid from thine eyes." Lord Jesus, strengthen my faith! Amen.

Jesus, Thou art mine forever,
Dearer far than earth to me;
Neither life nor death shall sever
Those sweet ties which bind to Thee.

154. The Blessed, Pious Life.

He died for all that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto Him which died for them and rose again. *2 Cor. 5, 15.*

With exquisite sweetness our Catechism adds that we *"live under Him* [our Lord Jesus Christ] *in His kingdom and serve Him."* Yes, this is most certainly true, that Christ's kingdom is no dead, empty, unfruitful science; no, he who is in Christ's kingdom *lives* therein. He lives under Him, under the Lord Jesus Christ, his heavenly Head and King. And he really *has* this King and Lord, who actually is his own; and he serves Him with his whole heart and life. This is most certainly true; this we believe, teach, and confess in our Lutheran Church.

Two things our Catechism here points out to us. In the first place, we should *"live under Him in His kingdom,"* that is, under the protection and reign of our Lord Jesus Christ, our heavenly King. This is the mind of a true Christian — he wishes wholly to belong to his Savior; he therefore wishes to live only according to the will of his Lord and Savior; he does not look for riches and an easy life here on earth, but his only wish is that God's will may be done in all things. It, therefore, is his intention to walk only in the ways of the Lord and to be led and guided and governed by Him in everything. Thus a Christian lives under Him, and he is certain that this his Lord and King defends, guards, and protects him in all his ways. Verily, it is a blessed life which true Christians lead already here on earth.

And while they live under Him in that manner, they also *serve Him.* Such service is rendered with the heart and with the whole outward life. Mere outward pharisaism, mere outward works of the Law, are far from being a pious Christian life. *To serve the Lord Jesus Christ,* this alone is true godliness and a real Christian life. This flows from a genuine love of the Savior, who has redeemed and saved us; it is but an offering of thankfulness, as St. John says: "We love Him because He first loved us." This love of God is shed abroad in our hearts; it is the real life of a Christian. It makes us zealous of good works.

Prayer.

Dear Lord Jesus, I heartily pray Thee that for the duties to be assumed by me Thou wouldst bestow upon me prudence, wisdom, and understanding and grant success and blessing, together with good health, so that I may not only make a good beginning, but in Thy name and by Thine aid arrive at a profitable close, thus at all times faithfully attending to my duties with a clear conscience and in Thy fear. And let me do all my work as unto Thee; not with eye-service, as a man-pleaser, but as serving Thee, doing the will of God from the heart. Amen.

O Jesus, I have promised
To serve Thee to the end;
Be Thou forever near me,
My Master and my Friend.
I shall not fear the battle
If Thou art by my side,
Nor wander from the pathway
If Thou wilt be my Guide.

155. Love Is the Fruit of Faith.

In Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything nor uncircumcision, but faith, which worketh by love. *Gal. 5, 6.*

How closely faith and its fruit, or the state of grace in Christ and our life here on earth, are connected, our Catechism very appropriately indicates by saying that the true believers not only are in the kingdom of Christ, but that they live under Him and serve Him. Thus also the apostle says that in the sight of Christ nothing has any worth except faith, the faith which produces love. Everything else, be it ever so great, the grandest works of man, even faith and Christian knowledge, all avails nothing when love is lacking.

We all know the many passages of Scripture that treat of love, and yet, how seldom do we find this sweet and precious fruit of faith even among Christians! How averse to love are we all by nature! Is not every man a born egoist? And even if we are born again and made new creatures, if the inner man has been created in us, does not the outer man continually seek to gain the upper hand? Does not our inborn natural selfishness continually come to the surface and play false with us? How necessary, therefore, that we keep a watchful eye upon the tree of faith and see that it produces the fruit of love! And where this true love lives and reigns in the heart, an outward true godliness in word and deed will surely follow. It may also be said of love what Luther says of faith in his preface to the Epistle to the Romans: "It is a living, busy, working, mighty thing, so that it is impossible that it should not always do some good. It does not ask whether good works will have to be done; but before the question is put, it *has* done them and is continually doing them."

How necessary that we continually grow in love just as well as in faith! Let us see that our love be more general, more universal! Let us learn from Christ how to love!

Prayer.

O faithful Savior Jesus Christ, how great was Thy love toward us poor sinners! Let us take Thy love for a pattern; teach us how to love; let us follow Thy steps; let us be Thy true disciples in faith and in love. O Lord Jesus, be gracious and merciful to us and let not Thy bitter and painful sufferings and death be in vain for us. Grant us grace that we may be mindful of this all our days, heartily love and thank Thee for it, and by the contemplation of Thy pain and crucifixion crucify and mortify all fleshly lusts and evil desires and love our neighbor as ourselves. Amen.

But the fruits must not be missing,
Love thy neighbor without ceasing;
That true love let him receive
Which here to thee thy God doth give.

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156. What Assurance Have We that We Are Redeemed?

Christ was delivered for our offenses and was raised again for our justification. *Rom. 4, 25.*

How does Christ convince us of the reality and truth of His whole work of redemption and salvation? The answer to this question is given in the last sentence of Luther's explanation of the Second Article: "Even as He is risen from the dead, lives and reigns to all eternity. This is most certainly true." By what, then, do we know with certainty that we are redeemed and saved and have eternal life? Because He, our Savior, lives and reigns. For that reason, and only for that reason, we, too, shall live and reign with Him to all eternity. This blessed truth our Catechism would teach us in the last sentence of the Second Article. With the words, "Even as He . . . lives," it points to the resurrection of Christ as a pledge, security, and seal of our redemption and our own resurrection and salvation. So, then, this is the chief purpose of the resurrection of our Lord Jesus Christ.

In the first place, let us understand that the resurrection of Christ is a proof, pledge, and seal that death, devil, and hell are conquered. Christ's resurrection is the clearest proof that all our sins have been atoned for, that all the punishments have been borne, the curse of the Law suffered, and all demands of divine justice against sinful mankind satisfied.

In the second place, the resurrection of Christ is proof, pledge, and seal that through Christ life and salvation has been restored and brought to light. In His resurrection our Lord entered into the state of exaltation. But He did this as our Mediator and Substitute. He was exalted according to His human nature, according to the same nature which was humiliated, was made under the Law in order that He might fulfil it for us, and suffered and died. The same Christ whom we see in the state of humiliation entered into His heavenly glory. From this follows that the glory into which Christ entered at His resurrection was not only a revelation of His divine majesty, but also the wages and payment for His vicarious work and the proof that we are redeemed.

Prayer.

We render thanks unto Thee, O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou exalted Prince of Life, that Thou didst give Thyself for us into death as a propitiation for our sins, thereby redeeming us, and that in proof of such redemption Thou didst rise from the dead and bring forth righteousness, innocence, and eternal life. Amen.

In His deep humiliation
Like a worm on earth He died,
For our sins and death were on Him;
Now in power He's glorified.

What He said, a Man, rejected,
"I am Christ, the Son of God,"
By His glorious resurrection
Now is sounded out abroad!

Now our shame and death are buried!
And the Son of Man we see
Sitting on the throne of power,
Reigning in eternity.

157. The God-Man's State of Exaltation.

Wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name. *Phil. 2, 9.*

Our Christian Creed does not end with the word "buried." Suddenly everything is changed. All humiliation, poverty, frailty, and weakness is gone. We behold a most fascinating picture, the most brilliant scene; not only rays of hidden glory, but the bright Sun of Righteousness in all His beaming luster: divine majesty and power, heavenly riches, honor, and glory. Now all humiliation is past. We behold Christ in His glorious state of exaltation. The form of a servant is discarded, and He appears in all the splendor of His divine majesty.

What a difference between the humbled Christ and the exalted Christ! What a difference between Christ as He walked upon this earth before His death and as He appeared after His resurrection!

True, His body has the same print of the nails in hands and feet and the open side, yet how different is that body from what it had been before! Now it passes through the thickest walls and through bolted doors; it appears and is seen by the disciples, and after a while it vanishes; it floats in the air and, like a thoroughly spiritual body, is hindered by no obstacle. Now He fully and continually uses His divine majesty in the human body. Now His human body is just as much everywhere as His divinity. The human part of Christ, so to speak, is not far from us in a circumscribed or limited space of heaven; no, the man Jesus says to us, Matt. 28, 20: "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." He no more complains: "The Son of Man hath not where to lay His head," but He now triumphs: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth." "God set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under His feet." And He governs and protects His Church.

Prayer.

Lord Jesus, Thou exalted Savior, ever ready to help, Thou seest and knowest that we live in great distress and danger, and we know of neither counsel nor help and find in us no power to escape this great trouble. Our eyes, therefore, are turned to Thee, our only Comfort, Refuge, and Helper. Oh, lead us on the way to heaven, to Thy glory, where we shall be with Thee forever. Thine is the kingdom, which we are to inherit; Thine is the power to lead us into it; and Thine shall forever be all honor and glory when we, Thy redeemed, shall be happy in Thy heavenly kingdom, where we shall see Thy glory and be with Thee forever. Amen.

All hail the power of Jesus' name,
Let angels prostrate fall.
Bring forth the royal diadem
And crown Him Lord of all.

158. His Descent into Hell.

Christ was put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit; by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison. *1 Pet. 3, 18. 19.*

When, on the third day after His death, Christ was quickened in the grave, He first descended into hell. Scripture says Christ was put to death in the *flesh,* that is, in the humiliation of His human nature, but quickened by the *Spirit,* that is, by the divine glory of His human nature, "by which also He went and preached unto the spirits in prison." The prison into which He went is the place of torment, reserved for the wicked angels and unbelieving men.

For what purpose did Christ go into this prison? Assuredly not to suffer; for He suffered all that was necessary for our complete redemption on the cross. And when with His death on the cross the redemption of mankind was perfected, He said, "It is finished." His sufferings for us were ended. And as soon as He was quickened in the grave, He exhibited Himself to hell as its Conqueror; He manifested His glory; He triumphed over all His infernal enemies. "Having spoiled principalities and powers, He made a show of them openly, triumphing over them in it," as we read Col. 2, 15. The enemy was in full flight and the Victor in hot pursuit. The vanquished sought refuge in his hellish fortress, but to no purpose, he was pursued into the very gates of hell. And there the principalities and powers of hell were "spoiled." What does this mean? That means, first of all, their weapons were taken from them; and there stood the Prince of Darkness with his legions unarmed. Satan has nothing left him now wherewith he may overpower us Christians. He may attempt to injure us, but wound us unto death he never can; for he can no longer wield the sharp sword of the Law against us; also death has been taken away. By His descent into hell Christ showed that He is the Victor over death and the devil and that we who believe in this Victor are no longer in the power of Satan.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, we thank Thee for Thy victorious descent into hell. Thou hast spoiled our enemies of all their weapons; Thou hast taken all their armor. And now Thou sittest in majesty at the right hand of the Father. Grant us grace to realize that

Thou art still mindful of us, that Thou art our Advocate with the Father, that Thou dost preserve and govern Thy kingdom with power, and that Thou art pleased to receive us into Thy glory. We beseech Thee, destroy in our hearts the power of Satan and raise us up out of the death of sin into the heavenly life. Draw us to Thee that, where our treasure is, there our hearts may be also. Amen.

Hallelujah! Lo, He wakes,
Lives o'er death and hell victorious;
Earth in awe with trembling quakes
As the Hero rises glorious,
He who died on Golgotha.
Jesus lives! Hallelujah!

159. His Resurrection from the Dead.

I am the Resurrection and the Life; he that believeth in Me, though he were dead, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in Me shall never die! *John 11, 25. 26.*

On that great Easter Sunday the angels said to the women who had come to anoint Christ's body: "Why seek ye the Living among the dead? He is not here; He is risen." The disciples, on hearing of the angel's message, would not believe it. In order to assure them of the fact, Christ showed Himself to them at different times and in various places, ate and drank and conversed at length with them; and all this He did for the space of forty days, appearing not only to one at a time, but also to two, to seven, to ten, to eleven, and once even to five hundred brethren. The disciples were to be witnesses to the world of His glorious resurrection.

Still, our faith in Christ's resurrection does not rest on the testimony of men, however trustworthy they and their testimony may be, but on the testimony of God in the Holy Scriptures. And, oh, the great comfort we derive from the divine assurance that Christ is risen!

Why is the resurrection of Christ so comforting? First, because it conclusively proves that Christ is the Son of God and that His doctrine is the truth. Christ Himself pointed to His resurrection as the greatest proof of His divinity. He spoke the truth when He said: "I have power to lay down My life, and I have power to take it again." None but God could do this; Christ arose of His own power; He therefore is God. Further, Christ had foretold both His death and His resurrection. Both prophecies came true. Christ therefore is a true prophet; His doctrine is the truth. Finally, the resurrection of Jesus Christ does not only prove that Christ is the Son of God and that His doctrine is the truth, but also that God the Father has accepted the sacrifice of His Son for the reconciliation of the world and that all believers shall arise to eternal life. Christ was raised again for our justification. His suffering and death has been received by God the Father as payment in full, and if we believe in Him, His propitiatory sacrifice is imputed to us. We, too, shall live, live in eternity.

Prayer.

O Thou dear risen Savior, open Thou our eyes that we may see what Thy empty sepulcher means to us. Explain Thou to us the Scriptures that our hearts within us may burn. And then open Thou our mouths that we may proclaim the good tidings to every one that in Thee we have gained the victory and that through Thee forgiveness, peace, and heaven with all its ineffable bliss is ours. Thou hast given us the blessed promise: "My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life." This means fulness of joy and pleasures forevermore. Grant that this blessedness be ours! Amen.

Hallelujah, see the tomb,
Ye who o'er His death are pining;
Dry your tears, to joy give room
While the radiant Sun is shining.
Hear the angels' "Gloria";
Jesus lives! Halleluja!

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160. Christ's Ascension into Heaven.

He that descended is the same also that ascended far above all heavens that He might fill all things. ***Eph. 4, 10.***

On the fortieth day after His resurrection Christ led His apostles and many other disciples to Mount Olivet, near Bethany, and spoke to them of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God. The account of St. Mark reads: "So, then, after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven." St. Luke's account, too, is brief and simple: "And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them and carried into heaven." The third account we find in Acts: "And when He had spoken these things, while they [the disciples] beheld, He was taken up; and a cloud received Him out of their sight." Such was the visible part of His ascension. He did not suddenly disappear, but slowly rose before the eyes of the astonished disciples, rose higher and higher, until a cloud enveloped Him. A glorious event, indeed!

The other part, however, invisible to human eyes, was far more glorious. He was received into heaven. He ascended far above all heavens. He ascended to where He had been in the splendor of His deity before He took upon Him our humanity. Thus saith the Lord: "The heaven is My throne, and the earth is My footstool." And as Christ descended to the footstool of His Father in His humiliation, so He ascended to the throne of His Father in His exaltation. The same Jesus who once humbled Himself for us now entered for us into the glory of His Father.

Yes, *for us!* He said: "I go to prepare a place for you." By His holy, precious blood He purchased a place for us in His Father's house of many mansions; He won heaven for us, and by His ascension He took possession of heaven for us that we might be with Him in everlasting glory. He says: "Where I am, there shall also My servant be." What a comfort! Christ's ascension is a pledge assuring us that all who believe in Jesus shall also reach the heavenly goal. Oh, may many hearts in faith be opened to Him!

Prayer.

Grant unto us, O Father of grace, for the sake of Thine only-begotten Son, Jesus Christ, that we may constantly amend our walk, live in Thy fear, and prepare for the coming of Thy dear Son in order that we may meet Him in gladness, enter the new heaven, in which righteousness dwells, with joy and rejoicing, and eternally possess it with Thee. Amen.

No more the way is hidden,
Since Christ, our Head, arose;
No more to man forbidden
The road to heaven that goes.
Our Lord is gone before,
But here He will not leave us,
In heaven He'll soon receive us;
He opens wide the door.

161. The Christian Following Christ to Heaven.

For our conversation is in heaven, from whence also we look for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ. ***Phil. 3, 20.***

Great honors impose great duties. To whom much is given, from him shall much be required. If Jesus in heaven is our Treasure, our heart, too, must be in heaven. We must seek those things which are above, where Christ lives and reigns. This world is not our home, but our battle-field, through which we must journey to our heavenly home. Our conversation, that is, our citizenship, is in heaven. We are making for heaven. Heaven is our home.

That we are but *pilgrims* on this earth is apparent from the fact that only for a short while we can sojourn here. We come and go again. One generation is followed by another. Our earthly possessions we must leave to those who come after us, and the places which we have inhabited are occupied by others when we are gone. Yes, we Christians are pilgrims in this world — and *strangers.* People in a foreign country may attend strictly to their business, but must not meddle with the affairs of that country; so, too, with us, who are strangers in this world. We should not despise God's earth, we should also provide for our mortal bodies, we should enjoy God's creation, we should make life pleasant for ourselves in a lawful, God-pleasing way. Yet a Christian's true home is heaven.

If we only realized at all times what a beautiful place heaven is, what unspeakable joys are awaiting us in heaven, how much more would we long for heaven, and how much more careful would we be to walk as such whose conversation is in heaven! Yea, our life would then be a race to the heavenly goal. Does not the apostle say: "*Run* that ye may obtain"? We should press on, forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before: unspeakable happiness and bliss. Oh, how every Christian should make for this goal!

Prayer.

O Thou gracious and eternal God, heavenly Father, teach me to meditate often on my death that I may prepare for it in true repentance and at its approach, with confidence and bliss, leave this life of misery to be translated into Thy heavenly paradise together with all faithful Christians. Give me strength and endurance to reach that goal that I may not run half way and then become weary. Let me endure unto the end to be saved and obtain eternal life, my heavenly home.

O happy day and yet far happier hour,
When wilt thou come at last,
When fearless to my Father's love and power,
Whose promise standeth fast,
My soul I gladly render?
For surely will His hand
Lead her, with guidance tender,
To heaven, her fatherland.

162. Christ's Sitting at the Right Hand of God.

Sit Thou [the Father said to Christ] at My right hand until I make Thine enemies Thy footstool. *Ps. 110, 1.*

Our Creed continues: "He sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty." What, according to the Scriptures, is Christ's sitting at the right hand of God? It is this, that Christ, also according to His human nature, with divine power and majesty rules and fills all things and especially governs and protects His Church, of which He is the Head.

We must by no means think that He is confined to a far-away and limited space as man. The right hand of God is the divine power, by which He governs all things and particularly leads His Church on earth heavenward. We read in the first chapter of the Epistle to the Ephesians: "God set Him at His own right hand in the heavenly places, far above all principalities, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come; and hath put all things under His feet; and gave Him to be the Head over all things to the Church, which is His body, the fulness of Him that filleth all in all." The expression *set*, "God *set* Him," indicates that this was done according to Christ's human nature. The man Christ was exalted to an increasing participation in the divine government. Also according to His human nature Christ is now, and forever will be, the Ruler of the universe and the Protector of His Church. Christ, our Brother, is seated upon the heavenly throne.

What mighty consolation for us: our Brother is the omniscient and almighty Ruler of the world and the Defender of His Church! He knows all our needs and distress, our trials and tribulations; we shall not want. For means it fails Him never who sitteth at the right hand of God in the heavenly places. Surely this article of our faith is replete with consolation and encouragement for the Christians and the Christian Church.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, grant that we may continually enjoy Thy presence, look joyfully for Thy most certain and glorious second coming, and on the Last Day take part in the resurrection of the just. O heavenly Father, whom to know is everlasting life, grant us perfectly to know Thy Son Jesus Christ to be the Way, the Truth, and the Life, that, following His steps, we may steadfastly walk in the way that leadeth to eternal life. Give us a thorough knowledge of what it means that Christ is sitting at Thy right hand. Let Him be the Anchor of our soul. Amen.

He has raised our human nature
On the clouds to God's right hand;
There we sit in heavenly places,
There with Him in glory stand.
Jesus reigns, adored by angels;
Man with God is on the throne;
Mighty Lord, in Thine ascension
We by faith behold our own.

163. He Gave Gifts unto Men.

When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. *Eph. 4, 8.*

It was promised in the Old Testament, Ps. 68, 18: "Thou hast ascended on high, Thou hast led captivity captive; *Thou hast received gifts for men,* yea, for the rebellious also." What are these gifts which Jesus received on the day of His ascension and which He gives to us? The first is the one promised Acts 1, 8: "Ye shall receive *power after that the Holy Ghost* is come upon you." The Lord Jesus had often promised this gift of the Holy Ghost to His disciples. And He kept His promise.

The next gift is the *Gospel,* through which the Holy Ghost works in our hearts. Can we ever thank our dear Savior enough for this most necessary and precious gift, without which we would be spiritually dead, having no part in the Gospel or in the kingdom of God?

The third gift is the *ministry,* through which the Gospel is preached. When David prophesied of Christ's exaltation and its glorious power, he said, Ps. 68: "The Lord gave the Word; great was the company of those that published it." And St. Paul, explaining this prophecy, writes: "When He ascended up on high, He led captivity captive and gave gifts unto men. . . . And He gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers." And why does Christ give us the ministry with its apostles and prophets and evangelists and pastors and teachers? For no other reason than that we should not walk through life in blindness and ignorance, in uncertainty and fear, in doubt and desperation, but that we should recognize His grace and gifts, that we should be convinced of His grace and mercy, and that in life and in death we may trust and believe in Him and rejoice and take comfort in His divine gifts. And we should bring these gifts to others. Before the Lord entered the heavenly mansions, He said: "Preach the Gospel to every creature."

Prayer.

O Lord, I realize in very truth that not every man has faith. I believe, O Lord; but help my unbelief! Do not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. O Lord Jesus, Thou who sittest at the right hand of God, make intercession for me that my faith fail not. Let not the work of the Word of God through the ministry be in vain in my heart. And let the Gospel be a power unto salvation, not only to us Christians, but also to many who do not yet know Thee. O Lord, do not forsake us; be merciful to us and all men. Amen.

The Lord forsaketh not His flock,
His chosen generation;
He is their Refuge and their Rock,
Their Peace and their Salvation;
And with a mother's watchful love
He guides them wheresoe'er they rove.
To God all praise and glory!

164. Do Not Abuse Your Christian Liberty.

All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient; all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. *1 Cor. 10, 23.*

Christ has made us free. He has fulfilled all the commandments of God for us, and He thereby worked out for us a spotless righteousness which we appropriate to ourselves by faith in our blessed Redeemer. What God demands of us now is not that we should attempt to gain heaven by keeping the commandments, but that we should believe in His dear Son and obtain eternal life through His name.

Now, this doctrine of our Christian liberty has often been grossly abused. People are frequently using this liberty for a cloak of maliciousness. They have been arguing in this way: If Christ has made us free, then we can do as we please. But such thoughts come from the Father of Lies, the devil. Christ has not made us free that we should sin, but that we should walk in true holiness. And this all the more because there are so many weak Christians in the Church, whom they should not give any offense.

Who are these weak Christians? They are those whose knowledge and understanding of divine things is very limited. A scornful remark about their religion, an unkind act, a little gust of adversity, and they are in danger of falling away. What, then, is the duty of the strong? Paul writes, Rom. 15, 1. 2: "We that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak," that is, the strong ought to be considerate of the weak and be of great service to them that they may be edified and built up. They ought to set them right in all Christian kindness and patience. And they ought to refrain from things that are in themselves indeed innocent and lawful, rather than to offend a weak brother by making use of their Christian liberty. My liberty shall not cause one to stumble for whom Christ has died. Do not abuse your Christian liberty, but always be guided by love toward those who have not yet become strong in faith.

Prayer.

O Thou God of peace, unite our hearts with the bond of peace that we may live with each other in peace and unity, in humility and meekness. O Thou God of patience, give us patience for the time of our sojourn and perseverance unto the end. Fill our hearts with love and charity toward our neighbor. If he is in danger of being led astray, let us plead with him not blindly to follow the crowd, but to seek the narrow way, which leads to life. Let us refrain from using things if a weak brother is not yet aware of the freedom of a Christian in those things which are not forbidden in the Law. Amen.

Where'er I go, whate'er my task,
The counsel of my God I ask,
Who ruleth all things right.
Unless He gives both thought and deed,
The utmost pains can ne'er succeed,
And vain must be man's might.

165. His Return to Judge the Quick and the Dead.

God hath appointed a day in the which He will judge the world in righteousness by that Man whom He hath ordained. *Acts 17, 31.*

God has appointed a day of Judgment, a day of perdition of ungodly men, a day of destruction, in which all things shall pass away. The end of this world is as sure to come as the Word of God is true. Heaven and earth shall pass away. And that is the day on which our Savior will return visibly and in glory to judge the world in righteousness. "He is ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead." At His ascension the angels said: "This same Jesus which is taken up from you into heaven shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven." He will come in the clouds, with divine majesty and power, in the glory of His Father, and all holy angels with Him. And at His command all the dead will rise, and, together with all those still alive, they all will be brought before His throne of glory, and He will judge the quick and the dead. Then the unbelievers shall receive everlasting punishment, but the righteous eternal life. For we know even now what the verdict of the righteous judgment will be.

He will judge according to His Word, as He Himself said: "The Word that I have spoken, the same shall judge him in the Last Day." His Word is His Gospel of salvation through faith in Him. Christ said: "God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believeth on Him is not condemned; but he that believeth not is condemned already because he hath not believed in the name of the only-begotten Son." This sentence will be executed on the Last Day. If you are a true believer, your deeds of love will bear witness to your faith, and you will not be condemned; for through faith in Him you have forgiveness of all your sins. But if you are an unbeliever, do not think that your so-called good works will save you; your unbelief condemns you. Your works were not done from love of Him, in true faith.

Prayer.

My Lord and my God, I confess before Thee that with my innumerable sins I have deserved not only Thy fatherly chastening, but also eternal punishment. But I am heartily sorry that I have offended Thy majesty and have not kept Thy holy Law. But I know that Thou, O Father of mercies, hast no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked may turn from the error of his way and live. Therefore do I now turn to Thee with a contrite spirit and pray Thee to forgive all my sins. Cast me not off according to my deserts. Enter not into judgment with Thy servant, for whom Thy Son hath made atonement. Amen.

O grant us ever on the road
To trace the footsteps of our God,
That, when Thou shalt appear, arrayed
In light to judge the quick and dead,
We may to life immortal soar
Through Thee, who livest evermore.

166. The Last Day a Day of Joy for All True Christians.

And when these things begin to come to pass, then look up and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.

Luke 21, 28.

The Day of Judgment, as described in Holy Scripture, must be viewed by all the children of this world with fear and trembling. It is to them a day that will deprive them of all their joys and pleasures.

But what does Jesus say to His disciples, to the true Christians, about that day? Should they fear the Day of Judgment? No; He says: "When these things begin to come to pass, *then look up and lift up your heads; for your redemption draweth nigh.*" It is not a day of terror, but a day of joy, for all true Christians.

Even as in war the din of battle and the courage of men is awful to the vanquished, while the same sounds are like liberty bells to the victors, so it will be on the Last Day. For the Christians the troubles of this life will then be past, and the joys of heaven will begin. "Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." "Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at that Day, and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing."

It is a blessed thing to look forward to Judgment Day and to recognize in the Judge who is to pronounce our doom the same Savior by whose blood we are washed, to whom we have committed the keeping of our souls. O glorious day on which Christ will return! Then shall we behold our dear Savior face to face, and He will take us into His heavenly abode. He will reward us most abundantly for all the sufferings of this present time; He will wipe all the tears from our eyes; He will let us taste of His heavenly things. He will welcome us and say: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world."

Prayer.

Lord God, who hast sent Thy Son, Christ Jesus, into the world to suffer and die, to rise again on the third day, to ascend to heaven, and there to sit at Thy right hand and to hold everything in His hand, send us His Spirit and have us await His coming to judge both the quick and the dead, thus attaining to the eternal kingdom, our inheritance, which Thou wilt give to us through Him. We beseech Thee, O Lord God, let us look forward to that Day, not as a day of terror, but as a day of redemption, joy, and salvation. Let us always be prepared to meet Him; and when the hour of death draws nigh and we are to depart, grant that we may fall asleep unto eternal life in the true knowledge of our Savior. Amen.

With His reward
Christ comes; He tarries not; His day is near;
When men least look for Him, He will be here.
Prepare for Him!

167. The Signs of the Times Point to the End of the World.

The end of all things is at hand; be ye therefore sober and watch unto prayer. *1 Pet. 4, 7.*

"The Great Day of the Lord is near; it is near and hasteth greatly." "It is the last time." The Book reveals that in the latter days men shall walk in the ways of the people living in the days of Noah, whom God destroyed because of *their ungodly materialistic lives.* Matt. 25. Such is the condition of the world now. The sins in the days of Noah are the sins prevailing now. The love of material things has taken possession of the hearts of men, making them to be "traitors, heady, high-minded, incontinent, fierce, lovers of pleasure more than lovers of God."

The Bible also says that *wars* and rumors of wars *and great calamities* are to be signs of the approaching end. Nation shall rise against nation, kingdom against kingdom. There shall be famines, pestilence, and earthquakes. The tribes of the earth shall mourn, and the hearts of men shall be filled with fear of the things that shall come upon the earth. Lawlessness and revolution lift their monster heads, causing indescribable chaos.

God's holy Book furthermore tells us that great inroads will be made upon the Church by *many false prophets, who will arise and deceive many.* Matt. 24. Witness the desolation existing in the Church of to-day! So-called Christian churches resound with the soul-destroying error that man can save himself, can atone for sins with his own good works, wholly or in part.

Another sign of the end is *the falling away from Christ, a universal rejection of God's Word,* which is taking place to-day. Infidelity has become common; in all stages of society it is felt, waging war against the truth. "When the Son of Man cometh, shall He find faith on earth?" And iniquity shall abound, and the love of many shall wax cold.

Another sign of the approaching end is *the preaching of the Gospel to all nations.* Jesus says, Matt. 24, 14: "And this Gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations; and then shall the end come."

Prayer.

Lord God, since the evening of this world is now drawing nigh and the day is far spent, we would ask for the grace of Thy Spirit that we may ever be watchful and with a living faith, fervent love, firm hope, and holy walk wait for the blessed appearance of the glory of our Savior, when He shall come to judge the quick and the dead, that we may then receive Him fittingly and joyfully, enter eternal life with Him, and thus attain to the eternal day of joy and rest with all the elect. But while we are in this mortal frame, we pray Thee to grant us Thine almighty protection and to guard and preserve us from all harm and danger of body and soul. And let us work while it is day. Amen.

The time is short!
If thou wouldst work for God, it must be now;
If thou wouldst win the garland for thy brow,
Redeem the time.

168. Chiliasm Is a Dream.

Jesus answered, My kingdom is not of this world. *John 18, 36.*

The chiliasts claim that Christ will reign a thousand years in a visible kingdom here on earth. Our people are being importuned by chiliasts of every kind. The prophecies of the sacred writings are made to yield promises of a glorious millennium. And these claims are set forth with such assurance that many Christians are in danger of being addled. There is danger that the entire Christian world will be burned over by the fires of chiliastic fanaticism.

Now, what is the truth? The Scriptures directly teach that the kingdom of Christ is a spiritual, invisible, and not an earthly and visible kingdom. "My kingdom is not of this world," said He to Pilate, and the apostle declares: "The kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost." The kingdom of Christ is of a spiritual nature with spiritual joys. And because its joys are spiritual and not earthly, it must be a Kingdom of the Cross while it remains on this earth. Thus He said: "If a man will come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me"; and the apostle declared that "we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Being a Kingdom of Grace and the Cross, Christ's kingdom can never become a kingdom of earthly and visible glory. If it is Christ's kingdom, it must remain a Kingdom of Grace and Salvation for the soul and a Kingdom of the Cross until the end of the world. How often had Christ told His disciples that the kingdom of God is something which is within them, that the kingdom which He came to bring is not a worldly, but a spiritual kingdom!

What, then, are we to expect after Christ's ascension into heaven? We are to expect His return from heaven to judge the quick and the dead. Then, but not until then, shall we see our perfect deliverance from all evil and live and reign with Christ.

Prayer.

Grant, O Lord Jesus, we beseech Thee, that we may look forward with comfort and joy to the resurrection of our deceased bodies, which on the Last Day shall come forth again by virtue of Thy resurrection. And may we then with body and soul enter Thy kingdom of heavenly glory and grandeur! Let us not be deceived by false prophets, who promise such glory here on earth. Let us never forget that this earth is but a vale of tears, and that we are but pilgrims and strangers here below who must through much tribulation enter into Thy heavenly kingdom. Lead us, O Lord, through the cross to the crown. Amen.

Would'st thou inherit life with Christ on high?
    Then count the cost and know
    That here on earth below
Thou needs must suffer with thy Lord and die.
We reach that gain to which all else is loss,
But through the cross.

169. The Antichrist Prophesied in Second Thessalonians has Come.

Let no man deceive you by any means; for that day shall not come except there come a falling away first and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition, who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God or that is worshiped, so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, showing himself that he is God. *2 Thess. 2, 3. 4.*

Our Church says in one of her public confessions, in the Smalcald Articles: "The Pope is the very Antichrist." Luther and the Lutheran Church confess that the Pope of Rome is the Antichrist.

How did he become the Antichrist? The Roman bishops assumed a haughty demeanor and exalted themselves above the other bishops. Finally, they arrogated to themselves the position of supreme judges in the Church of God and considered themselves the vice-gerents of Christ on earth, whom all men, even princes and kings, must obey. The Roman bishop was now considered the visible head of the whole Christian world, the representative of Christ on earth, and the successor of St. Peter, having exclusive possession of the keys of heaven and the right to dictate what was to be taught and believed in the Church. What he laid down in matters of faith was considered binding, even if it was directly contrary to the Word of God. If a man dared to resist the decrees and commands of the Pope, he either had to retract and beg for mercy or he was excommunicated; many faithful confessors of Christ and His Word were even burned at the stake as heretics. The authority of the Pope was so great that he made himself king of kings, ruler of all rulers, and established a tyranny the like of which there never has been on earth.

As God he sat in the temple of God, a fountainhead of error to the world, prohibiting even the reading of the Bible, so that nobody knew what was right or wrong. Surely the Pope of Rome is the very Antichrist. The Antichrist has come, and the end of all things is at hand. Here the shallowness of the Reformed sects is revealed, which hold that Antichrist is yet to come. How is it possible that even some who call themselves Lutherans are in doubt on this point?

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, we praise Thee with our whole heart and thank Thy great goodness and mercy that Thou didst graciously grant us not only Thy saving Word and the holy Sacraments and didst purge Thy Church of the leaven of papistic doctrine and idolatry, but that Thou hast also redeemed us poor sinners from the realm of darkness, called us to the light of Thy holy Gospel, and translated us into the Kingdom of Grace. Preserve unto us the soul-saving treasure of Thy Gospel in its purity. Yea, Lord Jesus, our Good Shepherd, preserve unto us and our descendants Thy Word, for it is our hearts' comfort and joy. Amen.

My Shepherd is the Lord of all;
No want into my lot shall fall
While I have Him beside me.
He makes me rest in pastures green;
And where still waters flow between,
He graciously doth guide me.

170. Christ Our Prophet.

The Lord, thy God, will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto Him ye shall hearken. *Deut. 18, 15.*

In the first of the Ninety-five Theses which Luther wrote against papal indulgences, he voiced the glorious truth: "Our Lord and Master Jesus Christ has said." We, too, refuse to obey Antichrist as universal lord and master. We rather confess in our Lutheran Catechism: "I believe that Jesus Christ, true God, begotten of the Father from eternity, and also true man, born of the Virgin Mary, is my Lord." Why is He our Lord? Because God has exalted Him above all heavens to sit at the right hand of God. But the Pope "exalted *himself* above all that is called God." And Christ is our Lord because He has redeemed us. The Pope cannot redeem a single soul. Christ alone has redeemed us to bring us from death to life. He is our Lord. His very names indicate what He has done for the whole human race. He is called *Jesus* because He is the only *Savior* of all mankind. And He is called *Christ,* that is, the Anointed, because, like kings, priests, and prophets of old, He was *anointed with the Holy Ghost* and with power to be our Prophet, Priest, and King.

As a Prophet He proclaims salvation by preaching the Gospel. He is the Prophet of whom Moses spoke. For centuries Israel eagerly awaited, and ardently hoped for, the coming of this Prophet. And when He finally came into the world, vast multitudes flocked to hear Him. As unto children He taught them the heavenly truths and often explained them in parables that they might all the better understand them. And He taught His hearers as one having authority; and they admired His authority, wisdom, and eloquence, saying: "Never man spake like this man." After He had raised the widow's son, they said, "A great prophet is risen up among us," and, "God hath visited His people." When He had fed the five thousand, they said, "This is of a truth that Prophet that should come into the world."

And after His ascension He did not cease to exercise His prophetic office, but committed to the Church, to those believing in Him, the ministry of reconciliation, that by the preaching of the Gospel His redemption might be made known to every creature.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou only-begotten Son of God, Thou Prophet who was to come, we give Thee most hearty thanks that Thou didst by word and deed reveal and proclaim to men the eternal counsel of God and by the preaching of the Gospel still dost exercise Thy prophetic office for our salvation. Thou causest to be made known even now the glad tidings: "God so loved the world that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life." We praise Thee for Thy goodness all our days. Amen.

What hast Thou left ungranted
To give me glad relief?
When soul and body panted
In utmost depth of grief,
In deepest degradation,
Devoid of joy and peace,
Then Thou, my soul's Salvation,
Didst come to bring release.

171. Christ Our High Priest.

Such an High Priest became us who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens; who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins and then for the people's; for this He did once when He offered up Himself. *Heb. 7, 26. 27.*

Christ performed His high-priestly office by fulfilling the Law in our stead, giving Himself a ransom for sinners by sacrificing Himself for us, and making intercession for us before the Father as our Advocate pleading our cause. In all this there is nothing superfluous, not a single thing which would not be necessary for the salvation of sinners.

If Jesus had not *fulfilled the Law of God* completely to the very last jot, no sinner could ever be justified; for the heavens shall fall and the earth be removed, but of the Law not one tittle shall pass away; it must all be fulfilled. And in every point He did everything necessary for our redemption. He has made all things ready, and to this day He provides for each soul all things needful for its comfort and its salvation. Truly, such a High Priest became us!

Further, the high priest of the Old Testament daily had to offer sacrifice, first for his own sins and then for the people's. Not so Christ; He, by one offering, perfected an everlasting reconciliation of God with man by fulfilling the Law of God for us and by *offering up Himself* upon the altar of the cross, by His innocent suffering and death. Thus He made atonement for all and changed the wrath of God to grace. For by the sacrifice of Christ, God has been perfectly reconciled to all men.

But our Lord and Savior has not only perfectly reconciled God unto us, He also brings us to perfect communion with Him. Through His *intercession* He continually keeps open for us a free access to God. In the Old Testament the high priest sprinkled the mercy-seat with the blood of the victims, thus bringing the blood before God. This was a figure of the sacrifice of Christ and the blood He would shed for all sinners and bring before the throne of God as a propitiation for their sins. The blood of Christ cries: "Father, forgive!" Without ceasing it testifies that the sins of all men are perfectly expiated and again and again, as it were, reminds God of the great atoning sacrifice on Calvary. But through the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments, He also enables us to go to God.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, we bless and praise Thee that Thou wast made under the Law and didst perfectly fulfil it in our stead to win for us the righteousness acceptable to God. Grant that we may in true faith accept Thee as our only and eternal High Priest, who, by entering once into the Holy of Holies, hast purchased for us eternal redemption and even now as our Advocate makest intercession for us. O Lord Jesus, who didst love us even unto death, grant us grace not to remain indifferent to Thy love, but to be moved by it to love Thee in return, not only in word, but in deed and truth. Amen.

Th' atoning work is done,
The Victim's blood is shed,
And Jesus now is gone
His people's cause to plead.
He is the High Priest of the blest,
And bears their names upon His breast.

172. We Must Build Our Souls and Doctrine on Christ, the Only Sure Foundation.

He is like a man which built an house and digged deep and laid the foundation on a rock; and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock. *Luke 6, 48.*

If a house is to stand firm, the walls must be strong and the framework compact, but above all it must rest on a safe and solid foundation.

We must build on the foundation which God has laid and of which He said by the prophet: "Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner-stone, a sure foundation." Speaking of this foundation-stone, Peter said to the members of the high Council: "Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, is the Stone which was set at naught of you builders, which is become the Head of the corner."

Countless have been the false foundations laid and embellished to attract and draw men from the only Foundation, of which Scripture says: "Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ." Many build upon reason and the dictates of the human mind. Christians do not make the human mind their God. They know that on questions of religion the human mind furnishes answers totally inadequate to the important cause involved. Reason is blind, dead, and an enemy of God in things spiritual. So it becomes sufficiently clear that human reason cannot be the foundation upon which the faith of a Christian may be built.

Many others base their hope of salvation on their own works of charity and worship, and this can bring no peace to the heart; it must leave the mind forever in uncertainty. No man can satisfy the demands of the Law. When a man has done all in his power, the Law continually requires yet more; and, indeed, man's works are in themselves uncertain.

There are those also who build their trust of obtaining grace and salvation upon what their own heart seems to tell them. But the heart of man is deceitful, and its sensations are more changeable than the moon. We must build our soul on Christ, the Rock of Ages.

Prayer.

O gracious God and Father in heaven, to Thee I render most humble thanks with heart and mouth that, by giving Thy dear Son, Thou didst visit us so graciously and didst raise up our Lord Jesus as a Horn of Salvation in Thy Church, to the end that we should grasp it in true faith, take comfort, joy, and bliss therefrom, and make it our stay in trouble and death. Let us not build our hope on the opinions of men or on our own righteousness, but solely on this Rock, which is the firm Corner-stone in the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Thy divine Word. Amen.

My hope is built on nothing less
Than Jesus' blood and righteousness.
I dare not trust the sweetest frame,
But wholly lean on Jesus' name.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

173. Christ Our King.

Pilate said unto Him, Art Thou a king? Jesus answered, Thou sayest that I am a king. To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth My voice. *John 18, 37.*

The office of our Lord Jesus Christ is divided into three parts, as He was anointed to be our Prophet, our High Priest, and our King. As a Prophet He proclaims salvation; as a Priest He obtains it; as a King He applies it. As our King He sits at the right hand of His Father, a Lord over all His enemies, governing, guiding, protecting, and preserving His Church upon earth. If Jesus Christ were not present with His Church on earth as our Defense and the Captain of our salvation, the enemies would long since have triumphed over it and utterly destroyed it. He is King of the whole world; all power is given unto Him in heaven and in earth; all creatures are subject to His sovereign will.

What a comfort for us to know that He, our Brother, our Redeemer, is Lord of all! In His government of the world He certainly does not overlook His own. He controls and directs all creatures in such a manner that all things work together for good to them that love Him. Everything in His Kingdom of Power must serve the upbuilding and preservation of His Kingdom of Grace. In this kingdom Christ rules by His voice, that is, the

Gospel, the saving message of grace. Hence it is not a worldly kingdom, but a spiritual kingdom; it is of a spiritual nature; our heavenly King is enthroned in the hearts of His believers. He fills the heart of each Christian with joy and grace, with comfort and peace.

Do *you* belong to this kingdom? Does Christ's voice rule your heart? Is He your only Hope and Consolation in life and in death? Then these consoling words apply to you: "Fear not, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the Kingdom." For from the Kingdom of Grace they are transferred to His Kingdom of Glory.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, God has placed Thee at His right hand above all angels and principalities, above all power and might, and above everything that is named in this world and in that which is to come. We praise Thee especially, however, because for the good of sinful mankind Thou hast, by Thy Gospel and Thy Holy Spirit, established the Kingdom of Grace on earth, and Thou dost extend this kingdom by turning the hearts of men to Thee. And when the number of Thine elect will be completed, Thou wilt lead them into glory and bless them with heavenly joys; and of Thy kingdom there will be no end. Grant unto me Thy grace that I, too, may enter Thy kingdom. Amen.

Why should the wicked move you?
Heed not their craft and spite!
Your Savior, who doth love you,
Will scatter all their might.
He comes, a King most glorious,
And all His earthly foes
In vain His course victorious
Endeavor to oppose.

174. Behold, Thy King Cometh unto Thee!

Hosanna to the Son of David! Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest! *Matt. 21, 9.*

Jesus Christ is the King of kings and Lord of lords. He is more than all the powerful rulers on earth. He is almighty. Woe unto us if that omnipotent King came to us provoked and full of anger! But no; our King does not come to us to mete out justice and to reward us according to our iniquities. He comes meek, in loving kindness.

Already in Holy Baptism Christ came to you. Through the washing of regeneration the merciful King has purged away your sin and cleansed you from it; He has forgiven your sins, delivered you from death and the devil, and promised to give you eternal salvation. Thus He comes to you. Have you received Him? Do you believe what the Lord says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved, but he that believeth not shall be damned"? Do you believe this? If not, your King comes to you in vain; for you receive Him not. But believe it, and you will be a loyal subject of this King of kings. Hosanna to Him in the highest!

And, behold, your King comes to you also in the Sacrament of the Altar, in Holy Communion, where His true body and blood are offered to you in, with, and under the bread and wine. It is the pledge Christ Himself gives you that your sins are forgiven. Behold, thy King cometh unto thee in this Sacrament! Receive Him, or rather, do not wilfully cast Him out. Do not resist the gracious working of the Holy Spirit; do not reject the grace of your Lord and Savior.

Again, behold, thy King cometh unto thee in His Word and in the preaching thereof. In the Gospel this King draws nigh unto you. There He tells you of God's great love to mankind, which moved Him to give His only-begotten Son to save "that which was lost." He speaks to you of divine grace, of the peace of God, and how we can obtain it, namely, by believing in Him, by accepting and appropriating His merits through faith. He speaks of our great hope of eternal life, which we already possess by faith. Thy King cometh unto thee. His arms are outstretched toward you to save you, to tear you from the precipice of perdition, and to bring you into the vale of rest.

Prayer.

In Thee, O Lord, our soul trusts, and under the shadow of Thy wings we find refuge. Turn Thou to us and satisfy us early with Thy mercy; then shall we offer the sacrifice of praise and bless Thy name, for it is good. Make us glad according to the days wherein Thou hast afflicted us and the years wherein we have seen evil. Stand by us in trouble, O Thou King of kings and Lord of lords; then shall we praise Thee and rejoice over Thy help all the days of our lives. Our hearts submit to Thy Word of promise and seek Thy face in childlike humility and confidence. Hosanna, O Lord! Save now, O Lord; send now prosperity! We rejoice and sing Thy praise, and by Thy grace we shall praise Thee in all eternity. Amen.

Joy to the world! The Lord is come;
Let earth receive her King;
Let every heart prepare Him room,
And heaven and nature sing.

175. Of Sanctification.

But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God. *1 Cor. 6, 11.*

We confess in the Third Article: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith." The First Article treats of creation, the Second of redemption, the Third of sanctification.

What is sanctification? By sanctification in the wider sense is meant the entire work of the Holy Spirit, by which man is separated from sin and the service of sin and becomes God's own, unto whom he now lives and whom he now serves. In this sense sanctification includes the giving of faith and justification, sanctification proper, the inner change that has been wrought in man, preservation in faith, and the complete restoration of the divine image on the Last Day. Sanctification in a narrower sense signifies exclusively the inner spiritual change or transformation of man, in consequence of which, by the power of the Holy Spirit working in Him, he now struggles against, and overcomes, Satan, the world, and his own flesh and walks in godliness and good works. So we see that without this blessed work of the Holy Ghost through the Gospel we would be lost in spite of Christ's redemption. For what could the redemption of Christ help us as long as we did not have the strength to believe in Jesus Christ or come to Him? Let us, then, consider what the Holy Ghost has done to bring us to Christ and sanctify us! Let us ponder this blessed work, rejoice, and take comfort!

As the Holy Ghost by the Gospel endows us with the true faith, He also keeps us in the saving faith by the same means. As Scripture says: "Ye are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation." Man has now new thoughts, new desires, new hopes. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." Man now strives to follow Christ in a holy and blameless life. He studies the divine commandments to learn what God would have him do. He walks in godliness and good works.

Prayer.

O God the Holy Ghost, let Thy gracious working upon my heart not be in vain. Work in me not only to will, but also to do of Thy good pleasure. Counteract, I pray Thee, the evil designs of the infernal fiend, arrest the promptings of my perverted heart, so that the holy resolution I have may not be hindered or come to naught. Open my eyes that I may clearly see and bitterly lament my sins. Give unto me that godly sorrow which worketh repentance unto salvation not to be repented of. Uphold me with Thy power that I may serve God all the days of my life, in holiness and righteousness, pleasing to God. Make me willing to further the cause of Christ. Amen.

Spirit of wisdom, turn our eyes
From idols and all earthly ties
To heavenly truth and love;
Spirit of understanding true,
Our souls with heavenly light endue
To seek the things above.

176. Who Is the Holy Ghost?

The Comforter, which is the Holy Ghost, whom the Father will send in My name, He shall teach you all things and bring all things to your remembrance, whatsoever I have said unto you. *John 14, 26.*

Christ calls Him the Comforter. He ascribes to Him work such as only a comforter can do: coming to the disciples, comforting them, and convincing them of the truth. He places this Comforter alongside of, and as being equal to, Himself, who stood before the disciples as a living person.

That the Holy Ghost is a Person we know from the fact that He subsists of Himself and acts for Himself; He acts by the independent, intelligent determinations of His own free will. If He were not such a Person, how much of a Comforter could He be? What good could His power do us? If the heavenly Comforter, whom the Father sent to us in Jesus' name, were no divine, compassionate, and loving Person, it were folly to trust in such a comforter; for he could not help us. But what kind of comforter is He? Christ says: "He shall teach you *all* things." So if that Third Person of the Holy Trinity did not exist and were not sent and did not operate upon us for our soul's salvation, we would still be in our natural blindness, without any spiritual knowledge. We would then have no Comforter. In spite of all the love of the Father, in spite of all the suffering of the Son in our stead, we would nevertheless be lost.

It therefore very much behooves us thoroughly to consider how much we owe to the Third Person of the Godhead, the dear heavenly Comforter. His grand work for our salvation is not nearly enough considered and esteemed. How hard is the human heart! How must this dear Comforter often teach, and explain, and plead, and beg, and bring all things to our remembrance before we comprehend and follow! How much does it often cost Him to get us to say a kind word to an enemy, or to pray, or to speak a word of praise to God! How often all His kindness is wasted upon us!

Prayer.

Enlighten our minds, we beseech Thee, O God, by the Spirit who proceedeth from Thee, that, as Thy Son hath promised, we may be led into all truth. Grant us a true knowledge of our sins and also a firm faith in our Savior Jesus Christ, which is the blessed work of the Holy Ghost. Let Him work in us also the sweet *fruits* of faith, so that we may be instant in prayer, gladly hear the Word of God, battle against sin, in cross and tribulation find consolation in Thy Word, and comfort ourselves with Thy gracious promises of eternal life. Let us be Thy temple, and let the Holy Ghost dwell in our hearts. Amen.

O Holy Ghost, descend, we pray,
Abide with us from day to day,
Thy temple deign to make us.
Let Thy bright beams, Thou heavenly Light,
Dispel the darkness of the night,
To joy and gladness wake us.

177. The Deplorable Condition of Natural Man in Spiritual Things.

O Israel, thou hast destroyed thyself; but in Me is thine help.
Hos. 13, 9.

God created man with a knowledge of His will and indued him with power to do His will. But man also had the power to resist God's will, to disobey Him, if he chose to do so.

When Satan deceived man and took him captive, he took from him everything that would tend to enable him to escape from that captivity, and therefore he robbed him of the last vestige of the power to do God's will. With this holy power gone, he now had only the faculty to *resist* God's will, to do evil. And this is exactly the deplorable condition of natural, unconverted man until this day, and it will be his condition until the end of time.

God, in His holy Word, often speaks of this utter inability of the natural man to do anything that is good and of his power to resist the Holy Spirit and therefore to prevent his conversion and salvation. Jer. 13, 23 we read: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard his spots? Then may ye also do good, that are accustomed to do evil." How often would Jesus have gathered the inhabitants of Jerusalem together, "even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings," but He did not succeed. Why? With tears in His eyes He complains: *"And ye would not."* Matt. 23, 37. And does not already the prophet of old complain of Israel: "Thou hast destroyed *thyself"?* This is the condition of natural man. He is, as the apostle writes to the Ephesians, "dead in trespasses and sins." *"Dead"* — there is no spiritual life in natural man, not a spark of it. How is he to come to life? By his own powers? No; he is *dead;* he has no power. How, then, is he to be brought to spiritual life? Through the work of the Holy Ghost. See, then, the great necessity of this work and its divine power!

Prayer.

Holy Ghost, one with the Father and the Son, eternally proceeding from both and yet never severed from them, we pray Thee, convince us of the necessity of Thy gracious presence. For of what value would have been to us the Father's love and the Son's suffering if Thou didst not come to sanctify our hearts? Without Thy light, how could we ever see the truth? Without Thy power, how could we ever apprehend and hold fast our Savior's grace? Without Thy continued labor, how could we ever hope to persevere unto the end? Without Thy joy, how could we be cheered? Without Thy comfort, how could our bleeding hearts be healed? Continue, therefore, to dwell in our hearts unto our blessed end. Amen.

Holy Ghost, with joy divine,
Cheer this saddened heart of mine;
Bid my many woes depart,
Heal my wounded, bleeding heart.

178. The Holy Ghost Works Our Conversion and Enlightens Us.

God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. *2 Cor. 4, 6.*

What is conversion? Conversion is the changing of a child of Satan into a child of God. It is a turning from darkness to light. The branch of a wild olive-tree is ingrafted into the true olive-tree, which is Christ. The wicked and deceitful heart is changed to a sanctified and honest heart. The darkened understanding of man is enlightened so that he is able to receive and to know the things of the Spirit of God. His will is freed from the bondage of sin and Satan and made free in Christ Jesus, so that he becomes able and willing to do good works. His mind, which is at enmity with God, is thoroughly changed so that he becomes reconciled to God. In other words, in conversion the relation of the sinner to God is radically changed.

How did this change come about? Man is dead in sins and cannot in any way cooperate in his conversion, even as dead Lazarus could not cooperate in raising himself back to life. It is clear that if any change for the better is to take place in man, that change must be effected by God.

The work of conversion is of such a character that it can be performed by almighty power alone; it can therefore be ascribed only to God. No man can bring himself to life. Our Catechism, therefore, says: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with

His gifts." Can there be a more wonderful work than the conversion of a sinner? Does it not seem to be an utterly impossible thing that man as he is by nature since the fall of Adam, born in sin, totally depraved, dead in sin, should become alive in Christ Jesus, that his very heart should be changed, that he should be made a new creature, seeking the things that are above, that his heart should be filled with heavenly thoughts and desires? Yet this is what the Holy Ghost can do, and He alone can do it. He makes the heart a fitting temple of God.

Prayer.

Come, Holy Spirit, Thou heavenly Dove of peace, enter our hearts and assure them of the sweet truth that the billows of our heavenly Father's wrath have now been assuaged, that the kindness and love of our dear Savior has appeared, and that through God's wonderful grace we have the opportunity of entering upon a new life in a redeemed world in which already now God is to live among us and in which we are to live and walk in the most blessed communion with God. We pray Thee, preserve us in this communion until we shall see our Savior face to face, never again to be separated from Him. Lead us from darkness to eternal light. Amen.

Holy Ghost, with light divine,
Shine upon this heart of mine;
Chase the shades of night away,
Turn my darkness into day.

179. The Holy Ghost Brings Us to Faith in Christ.

No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost.
1 Cor. 12, 3.

What is firm faith in Christ and His redemption? Is it merely taking for granted the fact that He died for the sins of the world, that He wrought salvation for sinners in general? O no! True faith, the faith that prompts us to call on the name of the Lord, the faith that is necessary for salvation, is infinitely more. It is not merely declaring one's belief in the truth of the message of the Gospel; true faith is the firm belief of a sinner that Jesus died for *him;* it is trusting in the merits of the Savior. This firm confidence of the heart is the essential part of faith. It is only when I am convinced that Christ died also for me, that He redeemed also me, a lost and condemned creature, purchased and won me from all sins, from death, and from the power of the devil, not with gold or silver, but with His holy, precious blood and with His innocent suffering and death, that I may be His own and live under Him in His kingdom and serve Him in everlasting righteousness, innocence, and blessedness, — it is only when I firmly believe this that I have the faith which saves my soul.

How are we to acquire this faith? The answer to this question is, You need not — indeed, you cannot — acquire faith of yourselves; God Himself must and will give you faith, the saving faith. "No man can say that Jesus is the Lord but by the Holy Ghost." We confess: "I believe that I cannot by my own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, my Lord, or come to Him; but the Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel, enlightened me with His gifts, sanctified and kept me in the true faith; even as He calls, gathers, enlightens, and sanctifies the whole Christian Church on earth and keeps it with Jesus Christ in the one true faith." Oh, then, resist not the Holy Ghost!

Prayer.

O God the Holy Ghost, who proceedest from the Father and the Son and with them art coeternal in one undivided substance, we worship Thee, we honor, praise, and magnify Thee, we thank Thee for all Thy bounties; especially, that by grace Thou hast called us and brought us to the holy Christian faith and still unceasingly dost perform Thy work in us. Because we cannot by our own reason or strength believe in Jesus Christ, our Lord, or come to Him, we beseech Thee that Thou wouldst teach us, guide us into all truth, preserve and strengthen us in the true faith, and finally give us the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls. Amen.

Made by the Holy Ghost Thine own,
Who wrought the saving faith in me —
Now to be Thine, yea, Thine alone,
O Lamb of God, I come to Thee.

180. The Holy Ghost Brings Us to Faith in Christ through the Gospel.

How shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard?
Rom. 10, 14.

The Holy Ghost has called me by the Gospel. He teaches the Law also, which gives the knowledge of sin and of divine wrath upon sin, and thus prepares man for the reception of the Gospel. But chiefly the Holy Ghost preaches the Gospel, that is, the glad tidings of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. After the Law has done its work, after it has made man feel that he is in need of a Savior, the Gospel sets in. The Gospel does not, like the Law, command man to do something, but invites him to appropriate the works *Christ* has done. It shows him Christ, the Savior of all sinners and therefore also his Savior. Through this Gospel the Holy Ghost calls men to believe in Christ.

And the call of the Holy Ghost through the Gospel is seriously intended for all men; for Christ is the Savior of all men. For this reason God has His Gospel made known in all the world, to every creature which is under heaven. And this Gospel quickens and is powerful. It is a living, incorruptible seed. This Gospel, the Word of Christ, being spirit and life and inseparably connected with the power of the Holy Ghost, is the divine instrument through which the kindling and the strengthening of faith is effected by Him who alone can give life and salvation. The Gospel of Christ is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth.

Whenever and wherever this Gospel is proclaimed, then and there is the Holy Ghost. He is always connected with the Gospel. Have you not often felt a most peculiar sensation within you as you heard that Gospel, a wonderful power forcing itself upon you? Behold, this is the Spirit of God, who knocks at the door of your heart, seeking admission, trying to convince, to regenerate you, to make you a true child of God.

Prayer.

O God the Holy Ghost, endow us with a true understanding of Thy Word, sanctify our devotions and our confidence in Thee, and bestow upon us peace of conscience together with everlasting comfort and joy and with constancy of faith. Thou, who art the living Finger of God, we beseech Thee, write Jesus Christ in our hearts. Confirm us with Thy testimony, comfort us against all fear and timidity of the flesh, be our faithful Helper against the accusations of the Wicked One, strengthen us against despondency, and through the Gospel-promise seal in our hearts the faith which Thou hast kindled, Thou, who art the Pledge of our inheritance for our redemption. Enlighten our darkness by the light of truth and lead us into all truth. Amen.

All our knowledge, sense, and sight
Lie in deepest darkness shrouded,
Till Thy brightness breaks our night
By the beams of truth unclouded.

181. Regeneration and Conversion Is in No Wise Our Own Merit.

Not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think anything as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is of God. *2 Cor. 3, 5.*

Regeneration is the implanting of a new, spiritual life in man. Conversion is the turning of the sinner away from sin and to God. This renewing of man in regeneration and conversion is wholly and solely God's work. As little as a tree can graft itself, even so little, yea, and much less, can man regenerate himself. Beginning, middle, and end is all God's operation. "It is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of His good pleasure."

While both the Word of God and our Confessions clearly teach that man may *resist* the power of God in the work of regeneration and conversion, they nowhere say that he can *assist* God in this work, not even in the least degree; and they plainly declare that to ascribe this work to man in any part or degree is to ascribe to man that which does not belong to him. Nothing less than creative power can make man a new creature. "Us, who were dead in sins, God hath quickened." Who but He can bring life out of death? The Spirit is Life. He is the almighty God. As, together with the Father and the Son, He at the beginning called the world out of nothing and imbued it with *physical* life, so He created *spiritual* life in our dead hearts and caused us to believe in Christ and His salvation.

It is solely and wholly the gracious working of the Holy Ghost that brings man from unbelief to faith. It is the Holy Ghost who by the power of the Gospel begins and completes conversion. Man can do nothing toward changing his evil will; God must effect this change. Man can do nothing toward enlightening his corrupt understanding; God must do that. Man cannot create anything; but God says: "A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you, and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you a heart of flesh." Where, then, is our own merit?

Prayer.

O God the Holy Ghost, I am not able of myself to bring about my conversion. No more than the Ethiopian can change his skin or the leopard his spots, can I of my own natural power abstain from sin and turn to good deeds, inasmuch as the imagination of my heart is evil continually from my youth. Even when by grace I resolve to offer the sacrifices of a broken and contrite heart, Satan endeavors to prevent me from doing the good that I would. For this reason I bow my knees to Thee, praying for the sake of Thy mercy: Turn Thou me, and I shall be turned. Grant me Thy grace, and I shall be saved. Amen.

By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless!
My heart, believ'st thou this or not?
Why tremblest thou with terror groundless?
Has Scripture e'er a falsehood taught?
Then this word also true must be:
By grace there is a crown for thee.

182. The Holy Ghost Also Gives Us Power to Do Good Works.

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. *Eph. 2, 10.*

In order to have true religion, two things are necessary, the new birth and the new life. First the new birth. "Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God." Religion, first of all, above all, aims at, and affects, the heart. "Give me, my son, thy heart," is the request of the Lord. "If thou shalt believe in thine heart, thou shalt be saved." The heart belongs to true religion, and true religion belongs in the heart. This is the first requisite of godliness — a new heart.

The other requisite is the new life. It is the natural and the necessary outflow of the new birth. When the heart has been changed by the Spirit of God, the new life will show it. The Lord once remarked: "By their fruits ye shall know them." You cannot be an undutiful parent, a spiteful husband, a quarrelsome wife, a disobedient child, an unscrupulous business man, and at the same time a good Christian. Whoever does not exercise the new life and will not walk right, and fight sin, will lose again what the Holy Ghost has wrought in him. Where good works are lacking, evil works are present, man loses faith and good conscience, and falls from grace.

As we are by nature, we are not able even to think anything good as of ourselves. It is God who enables us to "abound to every good work." The Savior says: "I am the Vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing." And in Gal. 5, 22 the good works are called "the fruit of the Spirit." These good works must be done, not according to the notions of men, but according to the will of God. Jesus says: "In vain they do worship Me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men." — Let your works be done for the glory of God.

Prayer.

O Holy Spirit, who hast ever been the sustaining Comfort and sweet Refreshment of the sorrowful and the suffering; who sheddest abroad love, joy, and peace in the hearts of the faithful and obedient followers of Christ: grant that we may be filled with all the fulness of Thy gifts of grace, that by Thy holy inspiration we may think those things that are good, and by Thy merciful guiding may perform them. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, let us think on these things. Amen.

Jesus, take this heart of mine,
Make it pure and wholly Thine.
Thou hast bled and died for me;
I will henceforth live to Thee.

183. Losing the Faith.

Now, the just shall live by faith; but if any man draw back, My soul shall have no pleasure in him. *Heb. 10, 38.*

Many fall into sin after baptism and lose their baptismal grace and cast away their heavenly inheritance. They lose the saving faith, which was kindled in their hearts in Holy Baptism, and in consequence of rank unbelief they cease to be the children of God. The loss of the saving faith is the most deplorable of all losses. One who has lost his faith may have wealth, he may enjoy the comforts and the pleasures of this present life, but if he is not altogether blind to his real condition, he must be aware of the awful fact that he is going to an eternity of destruction and doom, to certain shipwreck and eternal death. God is no longer his Friend and Father. Yea, despair seizes upon him, since he is without God in the world and therefore without hope. O let us therefore by the grace of God persevere in the faith! O let us hold fast to the profession of our faith!

There is danger that this precious treasure be wrested from you. You can lose your faith. Temptations will come upon the Christians. They will come unawares, take them by surprise. But as soon as they are *overcome* by temptation and sin, just so soon they are enslaved by sin; for of whom a man is overcome, of the same he is brought in bondage. The old man has gained dominion, and the new man has been conquered and routed. Faith has become extinct. His heart is hardened. It is difficult for the preaching of the Law to strike home and penetrate the heart. Thus it is that worldlings frequently cringe under the preaching of the Law while apostates remain sullen and unconcerned; that the Gospel of Jesus and His saving grace is sometimes readily accepted by the former, but often spurned by the latter, who have lost their faith. Their punishment will be greater. It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrah on the Last Day than for such apostates. O let us always beware of losing the faith!

Prayer.

O Thou God of grace and mercy, our dear Father in heaven, moved by grace and divine love, Thou hast given us Thy dear Son and with Him full salvation and grace. We now pray Thee, dear Father, preserve unto us this precious boon and heavenly gift in order that we may not lose it. We are indeed poor, wretched, and frail beings, who fall from one sin into the next, sinning now in thoughts, now in words, now in deeds, so that we are in great danger of falling from faith. O Lord, let us not grow faint and weary and falter. Let us not succumb to the allurements of the world and to the wiles and temptations of the devil, but let our faith ever be strengthened and refreshed. Amen.

Faith in Jesus Christ will give
Sweetest pleasures while we live;
Faith in Jesus must supply
Solid comfort when we die.

184. By the Gospel the Holy Ghost Keeps Us in the True Faith.

Ye are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation.
1 Pet. 1, 5.

How do you account for it that you did not drift away into the barren field of unbelief and godlessness, but came to a saving knowledge of Jesus Christ? That you were brought to the faith and that despite all the temptations around you you have persevered in the faith to this day? That you have not fallen away and are loving this present world as so many do who believe only for a while and in time of temptation fall away? Can you by your own reason or strength remain steadfast in your faith? No; we must confess: "The Holy Ghost has by the Gospel sanctified *and kept me in the true faith.*" "Ye are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation."

And the means through which He keeps us is the Gospel. Neglect the Gospel for even a short season and see how soon your faith will waver and your love grow cold. The Gospel is the light and air and meat and drink our faith needs to subsist. Even though faith be lost for a season, by means of the Gospel the Holy Spirit is able to restore it. Do not doubt this. You may be "confident of this very thing, that He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ," as the apostle assures us, Phil. 1, 6. Shall we not worship, honor, praise, and magnify God the Holy Ghost, the Giver and Preserver of life, who not only, by His gracious working in us, brought us to Christ, but also kept us in the true faith to this day by the means of grace? And should we not value this blessing above all earthly possessions?

Great cause, truly, we Christians have for rejoicing at all times since we live in the true, saving faith and therefore have forgiveness of all our sins; for where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also the grace of God, life, and salvation. Blessed are we indeed compared with many thousands who still live in unbelief and are under the bondage of sin.

Prayer.

Father of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, Thou hast sanctified us by Thy Spirit and called us out of darkness into Thy marvelous light. Grant, we beseech Thee, that at all times we may be duly conscious of, and grateful for, these unspeakable mercies, and that we manifest our gratitude not only with our lips, but also in our lives, by yielding body, soul, and mind to Thy service, walking before Thee in righteousness and holiness all our days. Deliver us more and more from the bondage of sin and error, from the power of the flesh, the corruption of the world, and the temptation of the devil that we may live in Thy fear and die in Thy peace. Amen.

O Holy Spirit, at the end,
Sweet Comforter, be Thou My Friend.
When death and hell assail me sore,
Leave me, O leave me nevermore,
But bear me safely through the strife,
As Thou hast promised, into life.

185. Why Is It that Not All Men are Brought to Faith and Salvation through the Gospel?

Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost; as your fathers did, so do ye.
Acts 7, 51.

There are many people who hear the Gospel and yet do not come to a true faith in Christ Jesus. And there are many who once did have the true faith in their hearts and later lost it and relapsed into spiritual death. All these are lost. Of such the Lord Jesus says Matt. 22, 14: "Many are called, but few are chosen."

How is this? What is the cause of it? Is not the Holy Ghost willing to do His work in every one who hears the Gospel? Does not God earnestly desire all men to be saved? Indeed, He does.

He solemnly affirms this Ezek. 33, 11: "As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live." Paul writes: "God will have all men to be saved." Peter writes: "The Lord is not willing that any should perish." It is wicked therefore to say that God does not want all men to be saved. Why, then, is it that so many who hear the Gospel are not saved? The only right answer is: *They are lost by their own fault,* because they obstinately resist the Word and Spirit of God. Therefore Stephen, the faithful confessor of Jesus Christ, said to the High Council at Jerusalem: *"Ye do always resist the Holy Ghost."*

What, then, is the true reason why these people do not believe? It is their wickedness that keeps them from accepting the Gospel, their spiritual pride and self-righteousness, or the love of sin, which makes them harden their hearts against the gracious invitation and obstinately to resist the Holy Ghost, so that they are lost by their own fault. On the Last Day there will be for them no excuse. The Lord will say to them as He said to Jerusalem, "Ye would not." Let us always be careful not to resist within ourselves when we hear what God has to say to us.

Prayer.

O God the Holy Ghost, preserve the faith Thou hast kindled in my heart and quench not the smoking flax. Guard me against the attacks of the Evil One. Let not my heart be hardened in unbelief and wickedness. Let me not tremble nor despair at the sight of death. Restrain my impatience and make me inclined to yield to Thy will, O God, my Lord. Grant me grace to bring my life to a happy and joyful close. Keep my heart and mind in the peace of my Lord Jesus Christ. And when I am no longer able to speak, then preserve and seal the memory of the holy name of Jesus Christ in my heart; and with it let me fall asleep in peace. Amen.

Delay not, delay not! The Spirit of grace,
Long grieved and resisted, may take His sad flight
And leave thee in darkness to finish thy race,
To sink in the vale of eternity's night.

186. Let Us Walk in the Spirit.

If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit. ***Gal. 5, 25.***

Christians live in the Spirit because they are endowed with the Spirit of God. Their heart is the temple of the Holy Ghost. The Spirit dwells in their hearts, applying to them the salvation through Christ and urging them to do the will of God.

But what must we do to *keep* the Spirit with us? We must *walk* in the Spirit! What does it mean to walk in the Spirit? To walk means not to stand still, but to move on. To walk in the Spirit means to move on upon one's way to heaven, to grow in faith, to abound yet more and more in love, to do those things which the Spirit urges us to do. A Christian does not rest, does not stand still, on the way to eternal life. He goes forward. He presses onward. He grows in sanctification. He increases in love and in all Christian virtues. So Paul writes Phil. 1, 9: "And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment." You must grow in knowledge, so that you may truly say: "I know whom I have believed." To this end you must be a regular attendant at the divine services and a diligent reader of your Bible. And see that you grow in all judgment, in the ability to tell what you are to do in doubtful circumstances, "that you may approve things that are excellent, that you may be sincere and without offense till the Day of Christ." See that you increase in holiness of life, in love to God and to your neighbor, in prayer, in divine worship, and in doing good to all men, especially to them who are of the household of faith. "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. Be not deceived; God is not mocked; for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. And let us not be weary in well-doing." Let us not stop walking in the Spirit.

Prayer.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, let Thy holy, joyous, and life-giving Spirit lend gladness to my distressed soul and contrite heart. The bruised reed Thou wilt not break, O Lord, and the smoking flax Thou wilt not quench. Thou wilt not cast me away from Thy presence, of this I feel confident. Thou wilt not suffer me to despair, but wilt renew me with Thy right Spirit, who will kindle and confirm the true faith and comfort in my heart. Let me sow to the Spirit and of the Spirit reap life everlasting. Amen.

And if a longer life
Be here on earth decreed me
And Thou through many a strife
To ripe old age wilt lead me,

Thy patience in me shed,
Avert all sin and shame,
And crown my hoary head
With pure, untarnished fame.

187. The Holy Christian Church, the Communion of Saints.

There is one body and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, one God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all. *Eph. 4, 4—6.*

What is the Church? The whole number of believers; for only believers, and all believers, are members of the Church.

From this it is evident that the Church is not dependent upon any man. It has only one great Head, one Shepherd, one Chief Bishop — Christ. Nor does the Church's existence depend upon outward organization, rules, and rituals, but upon faith in Christ. That faith is engendered and maintained wherever the Gospel of Christ is preached and the holy Sacraments are administered according to Christ's institution; wherever that is done, there you find the Church of Christ, that is, believers in Christ.

The Church of Christ is *one* because all believers are one spiritual body, whose only Head is Christ. They all draw their religion from one Book, they are all begotten and taught by one Spirit, and are built upon one foundation. — Again, they are *holy,* the communion of saints, because all the members of the Church are sanctified by faith in Christ and serve God with holy works. — Again, this Church is truly catholic, that is, *universal.* Believers in Christ are to be found in every part of the world, wherever the Gospel is preached. — And it is an *invisible* Church, since men cannot determine which of those who profess this faith are true Christians at heart. As Christ says: "The kingdom of God is within you." The communion of saints cannot be seen because it is a communion of hearts. "The Lord knoweth them that are His." All *we* can do is, as we confess in the Third Article of the Creed, to *believe* in its existence. But believe in it we must, for it is just as real as the invisible God, who gives it its origin and who preserves it at all times, even to the end of the world.

Prayer.

Most glorious and blessed God, who through the Holy Ghost hast made Thy Church to be the body of Christ, we humbly beseech Thee to grant to us and to all Thy people strong and steadfast faith that we may ever abide in the unity of the Spirit and thus grow up into Him in all things who is the Head, even Christ, to whom be all honor and praise for preserving and protecting His Church! Amen.

My Church, my Church, my dear old Church,
My glory and my pride;
Firm in the faith Immanuel taught,
She holds no faith beside.
Upon this Rock
'Gainst every shock,
Though gates of hell assail,
She stands secure
With promise sure:
They never shall prevail.

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188. I Am the Vine, Ye Are the Branches.

I am the Vine, ye are the branches; he that abideth in Me and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without Me ye can do nothing. *John 15, 5.*

The branch receives its sap and vitality from the vine. If a branch is separated from the vine, it withers; and such withered branches are cast into the fire and are burned. Now, Jesus Christ is the true Vine; the heavenly Father is the Master of the vineyard; we are the branches. Through His powerful Word and His Sacraments, God has planted us in Christ by faith. And He wants us to bring fruit in Christ, as the branch brings fruit from the vine. If a man does not bring fruit, God finally takes him away from Christ, for he has received His grace in vain.

Now, God through His Word has planted you in Christ and given you His righteousness. And now you are expected to bring the fruits of that righteousness, the fruits in Christ. The question is: Are you a good and fruitful or a barren and fruitless branch? Were you, in the past, a branch bringing its fruit in due season, or were you a barren branch, not bringing the fruit of the Spirit? If you were a fruitful branch, was it abundant fruit that you produced? Was the branch loaded with golden fruit, or was the fruit sparse and scarce? If you must confess that the fruit was not so abundant as it might and ought to have been, then repent of your lukewarmness and of your tardiness in bringing the fruits of the Spirit. But if you were a barren, unfruitful branch, then be warned; the Lord of the vineyard comes to seek fruit. Will He find it?

Have you been seeking first the kingdom of God and His righteousness? Did you walk in the fear of the Lord, crucifying the flesh with the affections and lusts? Did you practise charity toward all men? And did you do all this for the love of Jesus? This is the fruit which the Lord seeks. Will He find it? Will He find *much* fruit?

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou art the Vine, and we are the branches. Let this be to us a cause and incentive to good works and fruits of righteousness, that we, as Thy people, may be willing to worship Thee in the beauty of holiness. Grant that we may daily die unto sin, crucify and mortify the old Adam with his lusts and desires; that, on the other hand, we may arise spiritually, begin to live in righteousness, and walk in a new life. Let us be branches bringing forth much fruit. Amen.

Thou art the Vine, O nourish
The branches graft in Thee
And let them grow and flourish,
A fair and fruitful tree;

Thy Spirit pour within us
And let His gifts of grace
To deeds of kindness win us,
That best may win Thy praise.

189. In the Visible Church There Is Much Rubbish.

The kingdom of heaven is like unto a net that was cast into the sea and gathered of every kind; which, when it was full, they drew to shore and sat down and gathered the good into vessels, but cast the bad away. *Matt. 13, 47. 48.*

The kingdom of heaven, that is, the Church, is likened by our Lord to a net cast into the sea. The net spoken of is a hauling-net, which was sometimes half a mile in length. A net of such dimensions will naturally enclose fish of all sizes and kinds, some bad and others good. And so it is with the net of the Gospel. It is a large draw-net; it is not merely let down into one stream or river, but it dips the ocean, the wide and open sea of the world, and its threads are so strong, so well knitted together, that scarcely a single fish can escape. In other words, we have here a picture of the all-embracing Church of Christ, the preaching of the Gospel to every nation. But as the divine fishermen, the ministers of Christ, cast their net and enclose an abundance of human fishes, they find that not all are of the same quality; it is a mixed and motley multitude.

Behold, then, such is the outward appearance of the Church upon earth. Where the true Church is established, there you will find the sad effects of Satan's pernicious work. You will find wicked people among the good, godlessness developing alongside of piety, vice cropping forth on the very side of virtue, and children of the Evil One standing next to the children of God. This has always been the case, and thus it will be to the end of the world. Was there not a Judas among the disciples of Christ? Do we not find divisions in the congregations of the early Church, much quarrel and angry controversy among the members, injustice, a wrong use of the Lord's Supper, false prophets, men denying the doctrine of the resurrection, even a man who had committed incest? Is there a congregation or a whole church-body which has arrived at the stage of perfection? There is no such congregation or Church on earth; and why? Because Satan will always corrupt the divine Word; and our hearts, corrupted by sin, are always susceptible of all that is evil.

Prayer.

O almighty God, I come to Thee laden with sin and confess that I have deserved eternal damnation, being not only by nature a child of wrath and sold under sin, but having times untold transgressed all Thy commandments. But I take refuge in Thy boundless mercy and humbly pray Thee, enter not into judgment with me, but for Thy name's sake pardon mine iniquity. O Lord, here on earth Thy Church is polluted with many offenses; but at the end of the world a great change will come. Then a separation will take place. The good will be gathered into heaven, but the bad will be cast into eternal darkness. I submit to Thy will; do Thou as it seemeth good unto Thee; for Thine I am and would remain. Amen.

Abide with Thy protection
Among us, Lord, our Strength,
Lest world and Satan fell us
And overcome at length.

190. Which Is the True Visible Church?

Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. *Matt. 28, 20.*

It is not immaterial which one of the numerous visible churches we join; we must belong to the true one. Which is the true visible Church? God would have all men belong to the right one. We should not enter into union with false believers. Christ says: "Beware of false prophets!" His apostle warns: "Avoid them!" To be right and God-pleasing, a church union must follow Christ's rule: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed" and: "Teach them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you."

Which, then, according to what we have now heard, is the true visible Church on earth? It is the Church which teaches the *entire* doctrine of the Word of God. It is the Church which observes *all* things that Christ has commanded us to teach. But does the so-called Christian Church of to-day teach the whole Word of Christ pure and undefiled? Although all the various denominations profess that they do, yet we find that in most cases their statement is not true. They have to a great extent rejected the true doctrine of the Word of God.

But — praise and thanks to the gracious God! — there is a Church that teaches all the doctrines of the Word of God in their God-given purity and duly administers the Sacraments according to Christ's institution. This is our dear Lutheran Church. Our teaching and preaching is based solely upon the Word of God. The Scriptures rule supreme in our Church. When we thus speak of the Lutheran Church, we mean the Church as it has laid down its Creed in the Symbolical Books of the Lutheran Church. In so far we have a right to speak thus of our Church. In our Confessions our doctrinal position has been laid down with such extreme care that no one has yet succeeded in pointing out to us any doctrinal deviation from the Bible. Especially do we accept the doctrine of justification alone by grace.

Prayer.

O Thou God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, graciously bless Thy Church upon earth and endow Thy servants with the gifts of Thy grace that they may rightly dispense Thy Word and Sacraments to all the people to the strengthening of their faith in

Thee and the increase of love toward all men. Clothe Thy Church with the beauty of holiness and peace. Let no weapon prosper that is formed against her. Encourage the hearts and strengthen the hands of Thy faithful people in every place. Amen.

Lord Jesus, help, Thy Church uphold,
For we are sluggish, thoughtless, cold;
Indue Thy Word with power and grace
And spread its truth in every place.

O keep us in Thy Word, we pray;
The guile and rage of Satan stay;
Unto Thy Church grant, Lord, Thy grace,
Peace, concord, patience, fearlessness.

191. The Authority of the Church.

One is your Master, even Christ; and all ye are brethren.
Matt. 23, 8.

Acknowledging no authority but His, the disciples of Christ were to be among themselves a common brotherhood, a spiritual democracy — the family of God. And when He withdrew from them His visible presence, He henceforth dwelt among them in His Word and Sacraments. By these means of grace He filled them with all the fruits of His redemption, and these means of grace He committed to His Church as an everlasting inheritance. This, then, is the Church: the company of disciples under the headship and leadership of Christ. Christ is the Ruler; for He alone has authority in His kingdom, in His holy Christian Church.

And this authority He exercises through the Word. He therefore declares: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed." To this supreme court our Church appeals to determine and to decide all articles of faith, to regulate all actions, settle all questions that may arise, adjust all difficulties, end all controversies. That authority is the highest court of appeal. The authority of Holy Writ is final. The rule and standard is: "Thus saith the Lord! It is written! Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth."

No council, synod, or any representative body, much less any Church Father, professor, doctor of divinity, or ministerial association, has any authority in the Church beyond that of the Word of God; no, decidedly not; for — "all ye are brethren." But whatever the Bible declares to be the truth, that the Christian Church accepts as true. Whatever the Bible declares to be error, that the Christian Church rejects, though the whole world, aye, an angel from heaven, should commend it as the sublimest wisdom. You cannot evade this authority, my dear Christian. If you do not submit to the Word of Christ, you are a spiritual rebel, a fugitive from divine justice, a standing insult to the divine authority of the King of kings and Lord of lords.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou sole Authority and in Thy Church Thou only true Master of all Christendom, help us to labor with might and main to maintain and retain in our midst the Word of God in all its purity, to contribute willingly of our means toward the maintenance of Lutheran churches and schools, that the true visible Church may grow and our children's children may find in it the way of salvation. And grant us grace to remain saints of the holy Christian Church also by leading holy, godly lives; for we are the temple of God, and the Spirit of God dwells in us. Amen.

Thou holy Light, our Guide divine,
O cause the Word of Life to shine;
Teach us to know our God aright
And call Him Father with delight.
From error, Lord, our souls defend
That they on Christ alone attend,
In Him with living faith abiding,
In Him with all their might confiding.

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192. What Is the Business of the Church?

Go ye and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost. *Matt. 28, 19.*

There is no business like that of the Church — none as great, none as important, none as glorious. What is the Church's business? God has founded His Church for no other purpose than to fill the human heart with heavenly comfort. The Church is appointed to be a spiritual garden, full of living fountains, at which the weary pilgrim may rest, and from which he may draw refreshment to satisfy the longings of his famished soul.

All true comfort begins with, and rests upon, the sinner's reconciliation with God, upon the assurance that his sins are forgiven. And this blessed assurance is offered to him through the Gospel. And it is the Church's business to preach to him this old Gospel of sweet comfort and eternal salvation. It must be always borne in mind: the Church does not exist for the purpose of *entertaining* souls, but of leading them to Christ and salvation. The Master did not say: Go ye into all the world and *entertain* all nations, but: "*Teach* all nations." Nor should the Church be converted into a money-making machine and her pastor into a sensationalist. There is no question but that the expectation of the multitude regarding the Church has largely changed. Formerly the one and only thing which the Church was expected to do was to preach the Gospel, to minister to people's souls. Public opinion now is that the business of the Church is along the lines of social science and social service.

There are churches to-day which have been practically transformed into social settlements, where lunch counters, moving pictures, and scientific lectures have free sway. Fairs and ice cream socials and entertainments and receptions are deemed necessary to increase the church funds and uphold the church. All true Christians deplore these methods.

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, Thou didst gather unto Thy dear Son Christ Jesus, through Thy Word and the Holy Spirit, a church among us and hast preserved us against the devil and all enemies, yea, against the gates of hell. We pray Thee, O good and faithful God, let us and our dear children continue in the possession of this valuable and precious treasure that we may have promise of the life that now is and of that which is to come. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, Thy power make known,
For Thou art Lord of lords alone;
Shield Thy poor Christendom that we
May evermore sing praise to Thee.

Thou Comforter of priceless worth,
Give one mind to Thy flock on earth,
Stand by us in our final strife,
And lead us out of death to life.

193. The Unity of the Christian Church.

Endeavor to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.
Eph. 4, 3.

A union of churches is well-pleasing to God. We are, therefore, earnestly praying and willing to work for a true and holy union of all the different Christian churches. But we realize that it must be a union in fact and not only in form, a union in spirit and not only in outward organization. It must be a union brought about by the common acceptance of every sacred doctrine clearly revealed in the Scriptures; a union of true believers who confess Christ as their Savior in the Biblical sense of the term; a union in which the love of God and His Word is the all-pervading principle. Such a union it is to which our Master refers when He says: "If ye continue in My Word, then are ye My disciples indeed; and ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

The Christian Church is divided because men have forced their own interpretations upon the Bible instead of accepting all its teachings as divine truth. Therefore the Savior says in His high-priestly prayer: "That they may be one even as we are one." Such a union is possible by means of religious discussion and religious controversy carried on in the proper manner.

We deplore the divided state of the Church; but the church union movement of our day is in great part a manifestation of the spirit of indifference, which proceeds from the thought that it does not matter greatly what a person believes and that the Bible is not sufficient to settle every point of doctrine at dispute among Christians. As long as they hold such a view, they make it impossible for true Christians to join hands with them. How willingly we would join hands with other churches if they would but accept the teachings of our Church, that is, the whole Word of God, pure and unadulterated by false teachers. That is the one condition of church-fellowship and church union.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, forgive us all our sins and so rule our hearts that we may live together in a peaceful and Christian spirit, blessing Thy name here in time and hereafter in eternity. To that end we must continue in Thy Word. But, sad to say, there are many false doctrines in vogue among the different churches, and hence there is no unity of the Spirit. How can there be unity of the Spirit among churches with different creeds and tenets, one opposing the other? There is not one Lord, one faith, one Baptism, and therefore the outward union is a delusion. Oh, let us be one in truth and in Spirit! Amen.

He His Church has firmly founded,
He will guard what He began;
We, by sin and foes surrounded,
Build her bulwarks as we can.

194. We Should All Be Laborers in the Church.

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. *1 Pet. 4, 10.*

We all ought to be builders of the Christian Church. No man has a right to stand aloof from the Christian Church. There are many, however, who do not like to join a church. Why? They say: "I do not like to bind myself." But they are already obliged and pledged to perform the duties incumbent upon a member.

Each and every Christian ought not only to be a church-member, but also an *active* church-member. We all ought to be *laborers* in the Church, helping to build and give it ever wider dimensions. Those who have hitherto stood aloof from the Church or who are mere lingerers about its gates, let them learn what is their duty. It is a serious matter to shirk and lie at ease while others labor and the Master Builder is present. He sees and knows your every act and word. Woe unto you if you will not do your duty! You will be discharged from His service and be driven into a spiritual destitution. And what shall we say about those who endeavor to dissuade and hinder those who would labor, and about those whose greatest delight it is to tear down what others have built, to break up a congregation by false insinuations, by maligning the pastor and the members of the church? What will their lot be? God, their Master Builder, sees what they are doing, hears their words, and beholds the evil counsels of their hearts.

But do you ask how you may help to upbuild the Church? God needs not only skilled laborers, but also helpers. It is our duty to bring the Gospel to those who have no connection with any Christian congregation. Then there is also a large number of such as profess to be members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church, people who have been baptized and, possibly, confirmed, but who are no longer living stones in the walls of Zion. It is our privilege and our duty to find them with the help of the Gospel, to urge them to become living stones again in the holy temple of the Lord. And finally there are the children and young people with whom we are to build the Church.

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, let us continue to build wisely under the guidance of the Master Builder, God the Holy Spirit, upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, choosing Jesus as the chief Corner-stone of our edifice and seeking our material with prayerful diligence, that our Church may grow up a powerful organization, possessing spiritual strength to do good. Direct our efforts and strengthen our hearts, so that, while we are working faithfully, we may hopefully and confidently say:—

I love my Church, my dear old Church,
My fathers' and my own,
On prophets and apostles built,
And Christ the Corner-stone.
All else beside, by storm or tide,
May yet be overthrown,
But not my Church, my dear old Church,
My fathers' and my own.

195. Forgiveness of Sins, or Justification.

To him that worketh not, but believeth on Him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness. *Rom. 4, 5.*

Forgiveness, or justification, is a judicial act in the court of heaven. The sinner is the accused, God is the Judge. He alone can forgive sins, for against Him all have sinned and constantly do sin. To be forgiven, or to be justified, means to be declared "not guilty." When a person has been brought to trial for any offense and has been found guilty, he must make satisfaction for his offense. If he is able to make sufficient satisfaction, either through his own ability or that of a friend, the law accepts it, and the criminal leaves the court-room justified.

Whenever God justifies us, whenever He forgives our sins, He does not look upon our work and worthiness. Forgiveness is an act of divine love and mercy, having its source in divine grace, which is favor towards the undeserving. We are justified freely by His grace, *not by our works.* Justification is a free gift. There is nothing in us that could move God to forgive sins; for there is nothing in us but sin and misery, and when He beholds man in his misery, struggling for life and sinking to hell, His love is kindled, His heart is moved, and He forgives us and saves us *by the riches of His grace.* But has not God said, "The soul that sinneth, it shall die"? How can He be gracious, having threatened to punish the sinners? Does He, in violation of His divine justice, condone our guilt? Indeed not. God forgives sins *for Christ's sake.*

We have no ability of our own to make satisfaction to God. But an almighty Friend has died to make satisfaction for us. He was nailed to the cross; there He died between two malefactors. We hear the great word from His lips: "It is finished." Finished is the work of appeasing the wrath of Divine Majesty; finished is the task of giving full satisfaction to the immutable justice of God; finished is the redemption of the world. For every sinner forgiveness has been earned by the death of our Surety. And the hand that takes it is *faith.*

Prayer.

We humbly beseech Thee, O heavenly Father, to do away as the night all our transgressions and to scatter our sins as the morning cloud. Lord, forgive whatever is amiss in us, cleanse us from our sins, and let Thy Holy Spirit so go before and accompany and follow us day by day that we may believe in Thee and love Thee. O God of our salvation, who hast so loved the world as to send Thine only-begotten Son, who reconciled the world unto Himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them, we pray Thee, enter not into judgment with us, but look upon us mercifully in Christ, who is the propitiation for our sins, and in whom Thou hast declared Thyself to be ever well pleased. Amen.

Thou alone art all my Treasure,
Who hast died that I may live;
Thou conferrest noblest pleasure,
Who dost all my sins forgive.

196. The Prodigal Son.

Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out. *Acts 3, 19.*

A wealthy nobleman had two sons. The older was a dutiful young man, but the younger was a wayward boy. He prepared to leave home, to see the world, and to enjoy life. To the warnings and petitions of his father he turned a deaf ear. Freed from the restraints of his father's house, he soon yielded to the temptations of sin, and finding companions minded as he was, he wasted his substance with riotous living.

We were all children of wrath by nature and beggarly poor; but in Holy Baptism we were born again and made members of the household of God and heirs of all the riches of Christ. Moreover, at our confirmation we pledged ourselves to remain in the house of the Father all the days of our lives.

Are you still in the Father's house, or have you imitated the prodigal son? The great majority, allured by sin and carried away by the lusts of the flesh, wander away from the Father's house. Many parents themselves lead their baptized children in the ways of the world, while others let them grow up without any religious instruction, so that the spiritual life which was planted in them must die for lack of nurture. Many of those also who have been carefully instructed in the fear of the Lord fall away.

If you, like this prodigal, have left the house of the Father, oh, then follow him also in this, that you heartily repent of your sins and return! If those who depart from the Father's house forget God, He nevertheless does not forget them. He seeks them, and if need be, He uses severe means to bring men to a sense of their wickedness. God sought this prodigal in poverty and hunger, and by God's grace he came to himself. O you, who once were the children of God, consider from whence you are fallen, and repent and do the first works. Come to yourselves and say: I will go to my Father. God receives penitent sinners. And He gives them the robe of righteousness purchased and won for them by Christ. The father's joy illustrates the Lord's joy over sinners who return.

Prayer.

Lord Jesus, who callest unto Thee all those that labor and are heavy laden to refresh them and give rest unto their souls, we pray Thee, keep us from impenitence and unbelief, so that none of us may go astray. Take off from us the spotted garment of the flesh and of our own righteousness and adorn us with the garment of the merit earned with Thy blood. Strengthen our faith, increase our love and hope, and in the life to come make us sit at Thy heavenly table, where Thou wilt give us to eat of the eternal manna and to drink of the river of Thy pleasures in the house of our heavenly Father. Amen.

Come, ye sinners, poor and wretched,
  Weak and wounded, sick and sore!
Jesus ready stands to save you,
  Full of pity, love, and power;
    He is able,
He is willing; doubt no more.

197. Justification, Not by Our Works, But by Grace, the Chief Article of the Christian Faith.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits; who forgiveth all thine iniquities, who healeth all thy diseases. *Ps. 103, 2. 3.*

How is a man justified before God? This is a question involving life and death, damnation and eternal salvation. "The just shall live by faith," these words are simple enough for a child to understand; yet they puzzled Luther more than anything he had ever read. They seemed to him the darkest passage in all the Scriptures. But on his way back from Rome the thought suddenly flashed through his mind: Is not this passage as clear as the light of the sun? Has not Christ suffered and died for you? Your debts are paid, heaven is yours! When this great truth dawned upon his mind, it was, he said, as though heaven had been opened to him, so much was he overcome with the thought that heaven was to be his, not by his own exertion and works, but solely by faith; for there it was in the Bible: "The just shall live by faith"; and again: "In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace."

This doctrine of justification, of forgiveness of sins, by faith in Christ Jesus is the fundamental doctrine of Christianity. Justification, not by our works, but *by grace,* is the chief article of our Christian faith. This article of faith Luther preached in all its beauty and purity as no other man had done since the time of the apostles. It soon dispelled the spiritual darkness in which the Pope had enveloped the world, and it dealt the death-blow to papacy in the hearts of the people. Justification by faith alone — this is the very doctrine that mankind stands so sorely in need of to-day. No matter how little else our minds may be capable of grasping, if we know how to obtain forgiveness, the greatest blessing is ours; for where there is forgiveness, there is also life and salvation. Who can enumerate the blessings that came to us through this doctrine? It is the great central doctrine of the Bible.

Prayer.

O God of our salvation, who hast so loved the world as to make Thine only-begotten Son to be sin for us that we might in Him be made the righteousness which is pleasing to Thee, vouchsafe unto us the aid of Thy Holy Spirit that we may be firmly assured of this *mystery of grace* and, cleaving to it always with true faith, be enabled also to cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, following those who through faith and patience inherit the promises. Let us ever hold in the highest regard this most precious doctrine of salvation by grace, through which alone we can be saved. Amen.

By grace I'm saved, grace free and boundless!
My heart, believ'st thou this or not?
Why tremblest thou with terror groundless?
Has Scripture e'er a falsehood taught?
Then this word also true must be:
By grace there is a crown for thee.

198. This Article of the Christian Church Distinguishes It from All False Religions.

Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them. *Rom. 16, 17.*

How is man justified? All religions give an answer to this vital question, and with one accord all false religions teach that man is justified by the deeds of the Law. Turk and Pope, heathen and rationalist, declare: Do good, lead an upright life, and God will forgive your sins. But what says the true religion? What says Scripture? Does not God say in language which cannot be misunderstood: "We conclude that a man is justified by faith, without the deeds of the Law"; and: "By grace are ye saved, through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God; not of works, lest any man should boast"? And when the keeper of the prison at Philippi asked Paul and Silas: "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?" did they not answer, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ"? What would the Savior from sin and death be for if by the works of love which we perform we could attain to heaven?

We are justified before God, not by our works, but by grace, for Christ's sake, through faith — this is the chief point by which our Christian religion is distinguished from all other religions on earth. All other religions teach that man, by keeping certain statutes and doing certain works, must conciliate God and must so save himself. They have no mediator, no one to bring them to God. Alone our Christian religion teaches that man does not and cannot save himself by the keeping of ordinances and the doing of works, but salvation is alone in and by Jesus Christ, the one Mediator between God and man, who gave Himself a ransom for the redemption of the world. In Him God is reconciled, by Him man comes to God and aside from and without Him there is neither reconciliation nor justification nor salvation.

Prayer.

O merciful God, since the Gospel-message of the love of God as revealed in Christ is the only means of reconciling men with God, do Thou grant that all who go forth to preach the Gospel, proclaim this Word of Reconciliation with wisdom from on high, that they seek naught else than the honor of Thy name and the advancement of Thy kingdom. Grant that they clearly recognize the mystery of the Cross to be the center of our evangelical doctrine and not pretend to know anything save Christ Jesus and Him crucified and extol Him as the Hope of glory and the Fountain of salvation. Grant this through the grace of Jesus, the great Shepherd and Bishop of our souls. Amen.

Abide, O dearest Jesus,
Among us with Thy grace
That Satan may not harm us
Nor we to sin give place.

199. Justification by Grace Gives All the Glory to God Alone.

In Christ we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of His grace. ***Eph. 1, 7.***

What we could not earn we received as a gift. Since we could not offer God true righteousness, He offered it to us and justified us freely by His grace. Because our best works are, at the best, but imperfect and counterfeit money, therefore the Lord says: "Come ye, buy, and eat without money and without price." Is. 55, 1. What though the rich man offer a loaf of bread to a starving beggar for money, if that poor beggar has not even a cent to pay with? No; the rich man must give it, for nothing, without money and without price. And salvation is free; "it is the gift of God." Eph. 2, 8. This certainly gives all the glory to God alone!

So long as the salvation of Christ is preached in such a manner as to allow room for people to think that there is something in them to commend them to God, or that in some way they can do something to render themselves fit subjects for salvation, so long they are left to think themselves in the possession of some money. But when Christ is so preached as to make Him all and to leave man utterly penniless, then the self-righteous thoughts of many hearts become manifest, because it makes them real beggars before God and gives all the glory for their justification to God alone. Justification is *"freely by His grace."* So we read Rom. 3, 23. 24: "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God, being justified freely by His grace, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus." This, assuredly, gives all the glory to God alone.

However, just this "without money and without price," solely "through the riches of His grace," is so very offensive to the pride of natural man. But as soon as people know that they have no righteousness of their own before God, they will listen to the sweet message of the Gospel which offers salvation "freely by His grace." They will cling to Christ with all their heart.

Prayer.

O Lord, Thine honor and Thy service, which tends to Thy praise, I always have in view; therefore, O dear Lord, do not regard my unworthiness, but graciously consider that I am in great need of Thy help. Thou art the true and the only Help of sinners. Thy honor is to be advanced by all and everywhere. O Lord Jesus Christ, I am a poor sinner and cannot redeem or save myself; but Thou hast redeemed me by Thy bitter suffering and death; Thou wast taken prisoner, bound, mocked, and spitefully entreated; Thou wast falsely accused, beaten with many stripes, condemned and hanged on the cross for me; Thou hast wrought a perfect forgiveness for me, so that I am justified before God for Thy sake. Honor and praise be to Thy holy name forever and ever! Amen.

Glory be to God most high,
Glory to the Savior,
Glory to the Holy Ghost,
Now, henceforth, forever.

200. This Doctrine Affords Enduring Comfort to Poor Sinners.

The Law of Thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver. *Ps. 119, 72.*

This doctrine — justification not by our works, but by grace; not by the Law, but by the Gospel — alone affords enduring comfort to poor sinners. If you think that you can reach heaven by keeping the divine commandments, your soul will always be filled with dread and fear. You will feel like a slave who works in the sweat of his face and can never satisfy his master. You will never be able to say: Now I have done everything that the Law requires. The Law will comfort no one. By means of the Law you will never arrive at the joyful conviction that you are justified before God and have forgiveness of sins, that you are God's dear child, and that the heavenly Father is pleased with you.

The Gospel alone can afford to us this sweet comfort. For the Gospel is the glad tidings of the grace of God in Christ Jesus. The Gospel tells us that God does not desire to reward us according to our sins and iniquities, but that He has given us His dear Son, the Savior Jesus Christ, in whom we shall have forgiveness of all our transgressions because He took upon Himself our sins and suffered and died on the cross to atone for them. This precious Gospel is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth. If you receive this Gospel of the Savior Jesus into your heart, all your dread and fear will be removed, and it will afford to your conscience the sweetest of comfort — enduring comfort. You will be able to rejoice and say: "Mine eyes fail for Thy Word, saying, When wilt Thou comfort me?" The Gospel is Spirit and life. It works faith in him who was dead in trespasses and sins; it communicates strength to the Christian; it fills his heart with consolation and hope; it brings salvation to his immortal soul. Nothing else can set us free; nothing else can truly comfort and console us.

Prayer.

Grant, O merciful God, that we may profit from the unbelief of others, that we may apply the light given us to better purpose. Let the light of the Gospel rise unto those who as yet are far from Christ, the true Sun, and are groping in the dense darkness of idolatry. Bring these scattered sheep back into Thy spiritual fold by the voice of the Gospel. Let Christ be also to them the rock on which they stand. Let His cross and resurrection be their plea at Thy judgment-throne. Amen.

Blest river of salvation,
Pursue thy onward way;
Flow thou to every nation
Nor in thy richness stay;

Stay not till all the lowly
Triumphant reach their home;
Stay not till all the holy
Proclaim, "The Lord is come."

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201. Secret Societies, or Lodges.

Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you.
2 Cor. 6, 17.

The Christian religion teaches that we are saved through faith in Christ by the grace of God, and not by our works. The religious principles of the lodge are directly opposed to this. In the lodge a god is worshiped and addressed in prayer; but it is not the true God, not the God of the Bible. The lodge does not recognize the Christian religion as the only true religion. Like Masonry, after which all lodges are patterned, its religion is "of that universal kind in which all men agree." Such a religion, however, cannot be the religion of the Christian. True, the Knights Templars order is called "the Christian branch of Masonry." But the Knights Templars, although they use the name of Christ, do not confess Christ as the Son of God and the Savior of the world. They confess Christ as the Unitarians do, who do not believe in His divinity. The religion of the lodge is the world religion, salvation by our own works, the religion of the Pharisee in the Temple; but the Christian religion is the religion of the publican, who prayed: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" Of him Jesus said: "I tell you, this man went down to his house justified."

Let us always beware of the false religion of the Pharisee: hoping to be saved by our own works, as the *Odd-Fellows' Manual* has it, by "the elevation of the human character." Let us ever be true to the religion of the publican: desiring to be saved by the grace of God through faith in Christ Jesus. This is the Christian religion. It is the only true religion. All other religions are false. Now, the membership of the lodge is made up of all manner of religionists, also of Jews and professed unbelievers. A Christian cannot unite in worship with such people, nor can he be even a silent member of such a religious organization.

Prayer.

O Lord, the light that lighteth all men that have come into this world hath not enlightened all men that come into the world. Many are still walking in the vanity of their minds. Their mind is shrouded in darkness. They are estranged from the life that is of God, by reason of the ignorance that is in them and the blindness of their hearts. The god of this world has blinded their minds, and the common enemy of souls has captured them according to his pleasure. They seek salvation by the works of their own righteousness and therefore despise the atoning blood of Thy dear Son and our Savior Jesus Christ. Thus in vain they toil to secure happiness; in vain they strive to satisfy their heart's desire. Shed the light of Thy Gospel upon them for the saving of their souls. Amen.

Though gay companions o'er the bowl
Dispel a while the sense of ill;
Though pleasure fill the maddening soul,
The heart, the heart, is lonely still.

202. The Resurrection of the Body.

The hour is coming in the which all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth. *John 5, 28.*

The fourth point of the Third Article is: "I believe in the resurrection of the body." We have been created for eternity. Death is but the link between two modes of life. The day is coming when our mortal bodies shall be raised up and be clothed with immortality and honor. And this belief is not mere speculation. We believe in the resurrection of the body, not because we were able to reason it out that way. We know not what will come to pass. But God knows, and He has told us in His Word.

Jesus speaks of the hour in which all men shall come forth from their graves: "they that have done good unto the resurrection of life, and they that have done evil unto the resurrection of damnation." And as to the nature of the resurrection-bodies of the believers He says: "Neither can they die any more, for they are equal unto the angels." According to Scripture the believers will rise with glorified bodies to everlasting life; but the unbelievers will rise to eternal death, that is, to everlasting shame, contempt, and torment. Those, however, yet living on the earth at Christ's second coming shall not see temporal death, but shall be changed.

When the day of resurrection will arrive, we do not know. But certain signs are heralding its approach, and we know that the coming of the Lord is drawing nigh. The day will come when the folly of fools shall be apparent and the saints in Christ shall be manifest as the truly wise. We Christians comfort our souls with the certain hope of eternal life; we know that the soul is immortal and that the body, the same body that has died, shall live again. The more convinced we are that this hope will not fail us, and the more we dwell upon it in our meditations, the more will it encourage us to continue steadfast in faith in all our trials, knowing that our redemption is drawing nigh. Yonder is our eternal home.

Prayer.

Almighty God, Thy beloved Son Jesus Christ has destroyed death for us, by His rest in the tomb He has sanctified the graves of Thy saints, and by His glorious resurrection He has brought life and immortality to light, so that all who die in Him abide in peace and hope. — Receive, we pray Thee, our unfeigned thanks for that victory which He has obtained for us. Now we need not waver when sickness and sorrow distress us; for the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Now the shadows in the valley of death cannot frighten us. Amen.

Jesus, my Redeemer, lives!
I, too, unto life must waken;
Endless joy my Savior gives;
Shall my courage then be shaken?
Shall I fear? Or could the Head
Rise and leave His members dead?

203. Eternal Life.

My sheep hear My voice, and I know them, and they follow Me; and I give unto them eternal life. *John 10, 27. 28.*

Holy Writ tells us that all believers, when they die, according to the soul are at once with Christ, and after the Last Day both body and soul shall be with Christ, and they shall live with Him in eternal joy and glory. The life everlasting is life with Christ; even as Christ prayed: "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am that they may behold My glory." In eternal life the aim of Christ's work, namely, "that

God may be all in all," will be fulfilled. He will be fully all in all in eternal life, when the image of God will be restored in man and the most intimate communion with God will be realized. In heaven there will be nothing to separate us from God. All the blessed will be entirely pure in heart, holy, and without blemish, with every evil root of sin eliminated from their natures. We shall see God face to face. God, the Fountain of all blessedness, will be in us and we in Him. And when the beams of His goodness and glory irradiate us, we shall be unspeakably enriched by Him. We shall associate with God and with the holy angels and with the many millions of the blessed. We shall know them and shall be with them one heart and one soul — one family of God. As God is infinitely happy, so we, too, shall be perfectly happy. Eternal life is joy in such abundance as to fill our entire being. Thus we read Ps. 16, 11: "In Thy presence is fulness of joy; at Thy right hand there are pleasures forevermore." On earth no joy is unalloyed. Here there are so many bitter regrets, hearts wounded with grief, losses and sickness and pain, disasters and deaths. But in the presence of God all sorrow and woe is over. The days of mourning are ended. The tears are wiped away. The former things are past and are no more remembered. The heavenly joy is abiding. This is the glorious rest that remaineth to the people of God. Let us labor to enter into it.

Prayer.

Almighty, everlasting God, who didst give Thine only Son to be a High Priest of good things to come, hereafter grant unto us, Thine unworthy servants, to share in the company of the blessed, to enjoy the inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us. The sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us. Eye hath not seen, ear hath not heard, nor have entered into the heart of man the things that Thou hast prepared for them that love Thee. May this bliss be ours for Christ's sake! Amen.

Innumerous choirs before the shining throne
Their joyful anthems raise
Till heaven's glad halls are echoing with the tone
Of that great hymn of praise
And all its host rejoices
And all its blessed throng
Unite their myriad voices
In one eternal song.

204. Of Eternal Damnation.

And in hell he lifted up his eyes, being in torments. *Luke 16, 23.*

The day of resurrection is the great Day of Judgment. The Judge will look at the righteous and behold them clothed in His all-sufficient merit. He will look at the wicked and behold them utterly wanting. Then shall He say to these: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels." And they shall go into everlasting punishment.

As there are but two classes of people here on earth, the one for Christ, the other against Him, believers and unbelievers, so also on Judgment Day. And as there are but two classes of men, so there are but two abodes for men after death, heaven and hell. As surely as there is a heaven for believers, so surely is there a hell for unbelievers. But hell is the place of torment, of excruciating pain. This agony is caused by the flame of hell-fire. It is a fire adapted to the circumstances there existing and more horrible than any human mind can begin to imagine. The fire of hell will not consume those assigned to it, but will torment them forever and ever. It will cause the most horrible agony, insomuch that there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.

How great the suffering will be we may glean from the pitiful petition of the rich man in hell, who begged for a single drop of water to cool his parched tongue; but even this was denied him. The time of mercy has ceased, that of punishment, incessant punishment, has begun: anguish and pain of soul and body, with demons and Cains and Judases and Sodomites and all the ungodly as companions, in bitter remorse, hopeless despair, and envious rage. There is no relief, no alleviation. Therefore we should do all in our power to bring to men the Gospel of their salvation, which can save them from eternal damnation.

Prayer.

Lord God, we must confess that most of that which we have done is going to be consumed in the fire on the Last Day, like stubble and straw. To Thee, therefore, we flee and pray Thee, Let it not all be lost. Grant that we may at last be led into the arms of Thy kindness, that we may know that there is One whose mercy is ever new, One whose covenant of peace can never fail, One in whom, when all else fails, the troubled soul can find eternal rest. Let us always realize that every soul dying without Jesus will suffer the unspeakable torments of the damned. From this preserve us, O Lord, our God! Amen.

So, whene'er the signal's given
Us from earth to call away,
Borne on angels' wings to heaven,
Glad the summons to obey,
May we ready, may we ready,
Rise and reign in endless day!

205. Our Hope of Entering Heaven Is a Certain Hope.

I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus, our Lord.
Rom. 8, 38. 39.

We must be *sure* that we shall enter into eternal life. We cannot live on probabilities. In order that we may live without fear and die in peace, our faith must be a certainty, or it is nothing. We therefore say: "I believe that God will give unto me and all believers in Christ eternal life. *This is most certainly true."* Ours is a certain hope. And why can we be so sure of this? Because according to the Scriptures we are firmly to believe that, as God has in time called us by the Gospel, enlightened, sanctified, and kept us in the true faith, even so He has from eternity chosen us unto the adoption of children and unto life everlasting, and no man shall pluck us out of His hand.

Did God not love us when He gave His Son for the world? Did He not mean you and me when He commanded the Gospel to be preached to every creature? Did He not kindle the light of faith in our hearts through the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments? This is briefly what God has wrought in us. He has called us by the Gospel, enlightened and sanctified us, and kept us in the true faith.

And now listen! What God thus has done to us in *time* He had planned to do already from *eternity*. Eph. 1, 4: "He hath chosen us in Christ before the foundation of the world." 2 Tim. 1, 9: "God hath saved us and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to His own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began."

2 Thess. 2, 13: "God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth." Acts 13, 48: "As many as were ordained to eternal life believed." Be glad then, O ye believers in Christ, because your names are written in the book of life.

Prayer.

Almighty, everlasting God, who without any merit on our part, according to Thy abundant mercy, hast made us to be Thy children by faith in Thy dear Son, having begotten us again unto a lively hope, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for us: let us never depart from the way that leadeth to eternal peace and joy. Sanctify us wholly and confirm us unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, having overcome all in faith, patience, and hope, we may in Thy presence be crowned with everlasting joy; for the sake of Thy Son, our blessed Redeemer, in whom Thou hast chosen us before the foundation of the world. Amen.

Just as I am, Thou wilt receive,
Wilt welcome, pardon, cleanse, relieve;
Because Thy promise I believe,
O Lamb of God, I come! I come!

206. Why Is It that But Few are Chosen?

The last shall be first and the first last; for many be called, but few chosen. *Matt. 20, 16.*

We believe that God loved the whole world from eternity, created all men unto salvation, none unto damnation, and earnestly wills the salvation of all men. All those who perish, perish because of their own fault, *because of their unbelief,* and because they wilfully and persistently, to the end of their lives, resisted the Word and grace of God. The cause of this contempt of the Word is not God's foreknowledge or predestination, but man's perverted will, which *resists the Holy Spirit.*

Can it surprise us that but few are chosen? Not at all. For look at the kind of people who are not chosen. Who are they? Do they earnestly seek their soul's salvation? Do they accept the kind invitation of God through the Gospel? No; they scornfully despise it. They make light of the invitation, as Christ tells us in the Parable of the Great Supper, and go their ways, one to his farm, another to his merchandise, and others, as we hear in another parable, even take the king's servants and entreat them spitefully and slay them. The king who would not severely punish an outrage like this would not be worthy to be called a king. Even if these people had done this only to an earthly king, he would have been justified in showing his wrath; for a king must be respected. But the king who invites men to the Great Supper in heaven is none less than God Himself. The Son whom they slew is none less than Christ. His wedding-feast comprises all the grace, mercy, righteousness, joy, and bliss which He has merited for us. Whosoever, therefore, makes light of this invitation loves darkness more than light, money more than God's grace, the lust of the flesh more than the service of his Creator and Redeemer.

Can the fact that such people are not chosen, that, on the contrary, they are to be punished in all eternity, surprise or alarm any true Christian? Whose fault is it that they will be cast out into outer darkness on the great Day of Judgment, when the King comes to view those whom He has bidden to His great Supper? Whose fault is it that they are not numbered with the chosen few? It is entirely their own fault; they refused to believe, or they did not keep the faith.

Prayer.

Dear Lord God, I am a sinner. This one thing I feel, that I need help; therefore I come and seek it in all humility. The Canaanitish woman was a Gentile; she could hardly help but conclude that she was not elected, or chosen. If, now, she approached Thee and did not permit such thoughts to prevent her from beseeching Thee for grace and mercy, I, who have already been called by Thy Gospel, surely ought to follow her example and say: Lord, I come before Thee and am in need of one thing and another; whence shall I obtain help but from Thee in heaven, through Thine only Son, my Savior, Christ Jesus? I know my prayer will be heard. Amen.

Oh, can it be, Lord Jesus,
That Thou hast chosen me,
So poor and so unworthy,
Thy very own to be,
To dwell amid Thy splendors,
To gaze upon Thy face,
And through unending ages
Thy matchless beauties trace?

207. It Is a Good Thing that the Heart be Established.

I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that Day. *2 Tim. 1, 12.*

We have not as yet attained the goal. There may be a long journey between our conversion and our final entrance upon our eternal heritage. Shall we reach it? May not our enemies prevent us from doing so? Is not Satan, that roaring lion, offering innumerable obstructions? Must we not overcome the manifold temptations of the world and the deceitfulness of our own sinful heart? Shall we endure unto the end? Shall we persevere in the faith?

Let us not make this present life our all. Being truly wise by the grace of God, let us more and more sever the ties of worldliness that bind us fast. Though *in* the world, let us not be *of* the world. Let us do our duty well on earth, but let us set our affections on things above. In these all our hopes should be centered. Let us look forward to that glorious hope. "Let us draw near with a true heart, in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience and our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold fast the profession of our hope *without wavering;* for He is faithful that promised." He, the Lord, is faithful. We must confess that we have been unfaithful stewards. But God is faithful. And because He is faithful, He is not only the Author, but also the Finisher of our faith: Because He is faithful, He has not only begun the good work in us, but will also perform it until the day of Jesus Christ. He surely was in earnest about it when He came into the world to seek that which is lost. And He was in great earnest when He suffered and died for us on the cross. He also was in earnest when He called us through the Gospel and through faith made us the children of God. And now He intends to keep us in the true faith until the end. Therefore do not doubt that by God's grace you will reach the goal. God has promised that He will not leave you nor forsake you.

Prayer.

O Lord God, according to Thy mercy, we beseech thee, preserve us from all harm, graciously hold Thy hand over us, and mercifully deliver us from all danger and temptation. O Lord

God, be merciful unto us and forgive our sins for Jesus' sake. Help us, or we shall perish! And when our last hour has come, grant us Christian patience, keep us in true faith, and give us the end of our faith, even the salvation of our souls. Lord, be Thou with us, forsake us not! Remove all fear as to our perseverance in faith and the attainment of salvation. Amen.

When darkness veils His lovely face,
I rest on His unchanging grace.
In every high and stormy gale
My anchor holds within the veil.
On Christ, the solid Rock, I stand,
All other ground is sinking sand.

208. Christians Have True Comfort in Life and Death.

Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee. My flesh and my heart faileth; but God is the Strength of my heart and my Portion forever. *Ps. 73, 25. 26.*

Where shall we find comfort in the battles of life? And when the last bitter foe, death, approaches us, where shall we find comfort? On no other occasion are we so sorely in need of comfort, true comfort, as when death has entered our home and has robbed us of those who are near and dear to us. Unbelievers have nothing to comfort them at such a time. All they can say to themselves is, We must wait until time heals the smarting wound. What poor comfort! As to the loved ones who have left them, all they know is that they are gone and that they shall see them no more. Oh, how miserable is the unbeliever at the death-bed and at the grave! He has no comfort. And how miserable is he when he himself must enter the valley of the shadow of death! He recoils from it; for he knows that he must now go to meet God, against whom he has sinned.

The Christian must also walk through that valley; but there is a vast difference between the death of the believer and that of the unbeliever. The unbeliever must see death in all its terrors, but the believer has true comfort in life and death. How is this? It is because he puts his trust in Christ. He is confident through faith that Jesus Christ made atonement for his sins, that all that he has done amiss is canceled by the blood of Christ and is blotted out forever; and he knows: where there is forgiveness of sin, there is also life and salvation. The true and living faith makes the soul sure of paradise. This comfort is a real comfort, a lasting comfort, because it is founded on the sure promises of the Word of God, which stand firmer than earth's foundation. His Word shall not pass away.

Prayer.

O Lord, when we are in distress and danger, deliver us; when we are sick and weary, comfort us; be Thou our Physician. If, according to Thy will, we are to go hence, we commend our souls into Thy hands. O Lord, hear us! O Lord, have mercy! O Lord, give ear unto our prayer for Jesus Christ's sake! We do not doubt that Thou wilt graciously give what we are asking of Thee because we have the sure promise of Thy Word, which stands firm and unshaken; for heaven and earth shall pass away, but Thy Word shall not pass away; this is Thy promise. Amen.

Then let me softly, gently,
Lord, fall asleep in Thee,
When by Thy will and counsel
My last hour comes to me.

As to the oak the ivy,
So let me cleave to Thee
And live in heavenly glory
With Thee eternally.

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209. All True Christians Pray.

The Lord is nigh unto all them that call upon Him, to all that call upon Him in truth. He will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him; He also will hear their cry and will save them.
Ps. 145, 18. 19.

Prayer is an act of worship directed to God, the true God. God is our Father, and we are His children if we believe in Jesus Christ; "for the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me," Christ said to His disciples. Therefore it is our blessed privilege to pray to God, to speak to Him of all our sorrows, to tell Him of all our needs, and to ask Him for help.

Are we praying as much as we should? Many feel as though they were unworthy to come to God in prayer. They think: He will not hear us. Have we not transgressed His commandments and deserved His wrath and punishment? And what have we ever done that would make us worthy of being heard when we pray to Him? — Now, it is a fact that we all are utterly unworthy in His sight. What can we give to God in return for which we might duly expect Him to hear our prayers? Certainly nothing. We are not worthy to lift our eyes to heaven. We must draw nigh to the Throne of Grace in Christ, our Mediator, "who of God is made unto us Righteousness." If we appropriate His merits in faith, we are found worthy to stand before the throne of God. "What a Friend we have in Jesus all our sins and griefs to bear! What a privilege to carry everything to God in prayer!" When we pray to Him, we honor Him as God, and in this we should increase day by day and never grow faint.

All true Christians pray. They pray for themselves and for others. They pray in confident faith, in faith founded on the promises of God's Word. And therefore God will surely hear their prayer. They trust in His love, manifested in the sending of His beloved Son into this world, and in His truthfulness. They have the privilege of free, unlimited, and direct access to the throne of God.

Do *you* pray? Do you pray in the morning and before retiring? Do you pray at the table and thank God for His bountiful gifts?

Prayer.

O Lord God, we thank Thee that we may pray to Thee and tell Thee of all things that burden our soul. We thank Thee that Thou wilt hear our prayer and that Thou wilt not give us anything that is harmful to us. Teach us by Thy Holy Spirit to pray according to Thy will. We shall thank Thee for Thy merciful protection during the night and ask Thee to be our Guide during the day. We thank Thee for the blessings of the day that is now past and ask Thee to be with us while we sleep. Thou hast promised to supply all our need. Grant us grace to believe Thy promise. Amen.

What are thy wants to-day?
Whate'er they be,
Lift up thy heart and pray;
God heareth thee.
Then trustfully rely
That all thy need
He surely will supply
In very deed.

210. How, When, and Where Shall We Pray?

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. *John 16, 23.*

We must pray in Jesus' name. Praying in the name of Jesus, relying upon the meritorial work that He accomplished for us, we may and should be certain that God will hear us. "This is the confidence that we have to Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us." Christ Himself heartens us to pray confidently when He says: "All things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive." Matt. 21, 22. We should pray in true faith with childlike trust in God, our heavenly Father, and harboring no doubt whatsoever in our hearts as to whether we shall be heard. That is *how* we should pray.

And *when* shall we pray? Scripture says: "Pray always. Pray without ceasing. Continue constant in prayer." Prayer is the vital breath of our spiritual life. We cannot live without breathing. Ceasing to breathe means death. So with the spiritual life of a Christian. If he no longer prays, spiritual death has set in. We must live a life of prayer. To pray always is to live as in God's presence, to be in constant communion with Him. — But though Christians never cease to have communion with God, yet there should be stated times for prayer, times when we direct special prayers and supplications to God or render praise and thanksgiving to Him. David says in one of his psalms: "Evening and morning and at noon will I pray." Daniel was accustomed to kneel upon his knees three times a day. The early Christians continued steadfastly in prayer. Arising from our beds in the morning, should we not thank God? And should we not find a few moments to lift up our thoughts on high during the day? Should we not say grace at table and thank God for all His blessings and benefits?

As to our last question, *Where* shall we pray? I answer: The Lord is everywhere, and His ears are always open to the cries of His people. We read 1 Tim. 2, 8: "I will therefore that men pray everywhere, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting." But we should pray especially in public worship, as the psalmist says: "In the congregations will I bless the Lord."

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, through the suffering and death of Christ Jesus, our Mediator and Redeemer, we have access to

Thy fatherly heart. Thou hast also through Thy beloved Son taught us how, when, and where to pray. Grant, therefore, that in the obedience and confidence of faith we may offer up to Thee worship and prayer and praise. Pour out upon us the Spirit of grace and of supplications and let the words of our mouth and the meditations of our heart be acceptable in Thy sight, O Lord, our Strength and our Redeemer. Have compassion with our infirmities; and also those things which we do not venture to ask, give us for the sake of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Cease not to pray;
On Jesus as your All rely.
Would you live happy, happy die?
Take time to pray.

211. For Whom and What Should We Pray?

I exhort therefore that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks be made for all men. *1 Tim. 2, 1.*

A true Christian loves his neighbor, and he has the needs of his neighbor at heart as well as his own. He even prays for his enemies, being mindful of the Savior's words: "Pray for them which despitefully use you and persecute you." He particularly prays for the Church at large and for his own congregation. Not only, however, does he pray for others, but also, yea, most of all, for himself, especially for things pertaining to his soul's welfare.

For what should a Christian pray? The Lord says: "Whatsoever ye ask the Father in My name, He will give it you." Christ speaks to Christians, who ask in Christ's name. Christians are Christ-minded; they have His Spirit. "If any one has not the Spirit of Christ, He is none of His." Hence it would be folly to ask for anything and everything, just as we happen to be prompted by whims and fancies. True faith cannot expect anything but what God has promised to give. Foolish prayers are not heard. The Lord speaks to Christians, who pray according to His will, submitting their will to God's will. A Christian praying in Jesus' name will do as Jesus did, who prayed: "Father, if Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done." And the leper, approaching the Lord, said: "Lord, if Thou wilt, Thou canst make me clean." So, then, temporal gifts, such as health, riches, skill, wisdom, and the like, we should ask with the condition that God would grant them to us if they tend to His glory and our welfare. But spiritual gifts, which are absolutely necessary for our soul's salvation, we should ask without condition, because we know the will of our Father. He wills our salvation. Hence we pray for spiritual blessings, such as forgiveness of sins, the grace of God, faith, the guidance of the Holy Spirit, steadfastness in faith, perseverance in tribulation, without condition; and we are sure of being heard because we have His promise that He will give all this to us if we but ask Him.

Prayer.

O merciful and faithful God, we earnestly pray Thee, bestow upon us wisdom and strength, together with a courageous and fearless spirit, so that we may act prudently, overcome all obstacles that arise, and attain to a blessed and desired end by Thy fatherly guidance. O Lord Jesus, in Thy name and upon Thy Word I come to God in prayer, not only for myself, but also for all men. Be merciful to me and to all men. Be not far from us; hasten, O Lord, to succor us! Amen.

When in prayer we cry to Thee,
   Do Thou hear us;
From the stains of sin and shame
   Do Thou clear us;
'Mid the quicksands and the rocks
   Do Thou steer us;
In temptation, trial, grief,
   Be Thou near us.

212. What Should Induce Us to Pray?

Call upon Me in the day of trouble; I will deliver thee, and thou shalt glorify Me. *Ps. 50, 15.*

Why do we pray? First, because God wants us to seek His face. "Ask, seek, knock; seek ye My face; call upon Me," is what He tells us. In such and similar words we have *God's command to pray.* He does not merely give an advice, saying that it is a useful thing to pray. He does not leave it to our own judgment to determine for ourselves whether we should pray or not. No, this is a direct and express command: "Call upon Me in the day of trouble"; "Ask, and ye shall receive."

Another reason why we should pray is because *God has promised to hear us.* "I will deliver thee." "Every one that asketh, receiveth; and he that seeketh, findeth; and to him that knocketh it shall be opened." Here we have God's promise of help. But are not many prayers unheard? No prayer in Jesus' name will be unheard. When you pray for spiritual gifts, such as the grace of God and the forgiveness of sins, you always receive these gifts; for there is a special divine promise that they will be given you. In Jesus' name you may also pray for temporal gifts, for which you have no special divine promise; but when you pray for these gifts in Jesus' name, you must add: Thy will be done, O Lord; for Thou knowest best what is truly salutary for me. And God always hears also the prayers for temporal gifts; He either grants the very thing for which you have asked, or He gives us a still greater blessing in place of the gift we asked and which would not have been truly beneficial had we received it.

And should not our own cross, *our wants and necessities*, induce us to pray? As a child, when hurt or perplexed, goes to his father or his mother for help and comfort, so we Christians are to cast all our cares upon our heavenly Father. Prayer rids us of care, quiets the mind, draws the heart heavenward, and defeats unchaste and other unholy thoughts. It is a powerful weapon against Satan and has the promise of a glorious reward.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou gracious Lord and Savior, who for our sakes didst become a guest and pilgrim upon earth, I come unto Thee in humbleness of heart and pray Thee to take into Thy fostering care my whole life and walk in this world. Graciously preserve me, through the ministering care of Thy holy angels, on all my ways from all ills and misfortunes, from accidents and dangers of soul and body. To Thee I commit my going out and my coming in; to Thee I will thankfully ascribe all praise for my welfare. Amen.

I cried to God in my distress,
His mercy heard me calling;
My Savior saw my helplessness
And kept my feet from falling;
For this, Lord, praise and thanks to Thee!
Praise God most high, praise God with me!
To God all praise and glory!

213. To Whom We Should Pray.

Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve. *Matt. 4, 10.*

We are to pray to Him who has commanded us to pray, the true God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. To Him alone such honor is due, and He alone is able and willing to hear our prayers.

The one true God has made Himself known to us in three persons. It is the Triune God, the Holy Trinity. Those who believe in the Triune God are called Trinitarians. If you are not a Trinitarian, you really have no God at all; you are no better than the atheist, who asserts that there is no God. "He that honoreth not the Son honoreth not the Father, which hath sent Him." So, then, every would-be prayer which is not directed to the Holy Trinity in reality is no prayer. Therefore we cannot join the heathen, the Mohammedans, the Jews, the lodges, the Christian Scientists; for in their so-called prayers they do not confess Christ; or if they *do* mention His name, it is not the Christ of the Scriptures; and a Christless God is no God, but is an idol, and such a prayer is idolatry. But such heathenish prayers are spoken to-day, in our enlightened age, by millions of people. The Roman Catholic calls upon the Virgin Mary, upon angels and so-called saints. That is heathenish idolatry. Scripture forbids us to call upon saints. For we read Is. 63, 16: "Doubtless Thou art our Father; though Abraham" — a saint — "be ignorant of us and Israel" — another saint — "acknowledge us not, Thou, O Lord, art our Father, our Redeemer; Thy name is from everlasting." And in His combat with Satan, Christ said: "Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, and Him only shalt thou serve."

Only that is a true prayer which is addressed to the Triune God, and only those who believe in this Triune God can pray acceptably. These true believers are in intimate spiritual communion with God. Laying hold of His mercies and His willingness to hear those who call upon Him, they are joyfully waiting for the answer of their dear Father in heaven, in whom they confidently trust.

Prayer.

O Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Thou Triune God, the only true God in heaven and earth, my hope rests in Thee; no one will be forsaken who waiteth on Thee. O show me Thy ways and teach me Thy paths; for Thou art the God of my help, daily do I wait on Thee. Preserve my soul, save me, and lend Thine aid to all that concerns my welfare. Let me not be confounded, for I trust in Thee. O Thou only true, eternal God, Thou King of kings and Lord of lords, who alone hast immortality and dost dwell in a light to which no one can approach: we thank Thee that Thou hast revealed Thyself to us as one God in three Persons. We render unto Thee praise, honor, thanks, and glory. Amen.

Glory, glory, to the Father;
Glory, glory, to the Son;
Glory, glory, to the Spirit;
Glory to the Three in One!

214. God Is a Spirit.

God is a spirit; and they that worship Him must worship Him in spirit and in truth. *John 4, 24.*

Why do the Scriptures so often speak of God as having eyes, ears, mouth, heart, hands, feet, and the like, though God is a spirit? When the Scriptures speak thus of God, it is done to assist the weakness of our comprehension, to teach us facts which otherwise would be inconceivable to our minds. God has no material form. A spirit is not a body. What is it?

A spirit is a being that cannot be seen, that cannot be limited by space or time. Our soul, therefore, is also a spirit. Without leaving the body, the spirit of man takes its flight and wanders into times past. The spirit of man thinks and judges, chooses and rejects, hopes and fears, rejoices and mourns, loves and hates. The angels are also such spirits. An angel from God brought Daniel the answer to his prayer as fast as lightning. "He maketh His angels spirits, His ministers a flaming fire," says the psalmist. Thus, too, God is an invisible spirit, only much higher, supremely greater, infinitely perfect.

The spirit of man is a personal existence, angels are spirits and personal beings, and also God is a spirit and a personal Being. As such He says: "I am the Lord, thy God." God here says, "I am. He is conscious of His existence. No dead thing, like gold, silver, stone, wood, can say, "I am." God is conscious of the difference between His personality and that of others. He speaks and commands; He punishes and rewards; He is a self-conscious Personality. But God is the highest and most perfect Spirit. Besides Him there is no God. He is the living God; He has life in Himself, not having received it from any other. He is the Author and Giver of life. All other spirits are created; He is the Father of spirits, the one Creator and Sovereign Spirit. He is the Most High.

Prayer.

O God, Thou holy Spirit, do Thou sanctify every one of us that we may be of a Christian mind, sow unto the Spirit, and of the Spirit at one time reap life everlasting. Yea, when this whole world shall be fully ripe for the last harvest, then let us be gathered into Thy barns as pure wheat and be preserved in heaven unto joys everlasting. There, according to Thy promise, we shall rejoice with joy unspeakable. Hear us, O God, and grant all we ask for the sake of Thy dear Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Holy Spirit, all divine,
Dwell within this heart of mine;
Cast down every idol throne,
Reign supreme — and reign alone.

215. Our Father, Who Art in Heaven.

One God and Father of all, who is above all and through all and in you all. *Eph. 4, 6.*

"Many pray the Lord's Prayer a thousand times a year, and though they prayed it a thousand years, they would not have prayed one letter thereof properly." These words of Luther are a sweeping and striking assertion. Still, are they not true? Take, for instance, the opening words of that divine prayer, the familiar words "Our Father, who art in heaven." They are recited in every public service; every day they are on the lips of all Christians; yet, have we ever regarded the deep significance and inspiration hidden in them?

"Our Father." What sacred associations cluster around the word "father"! The thought of it fills us with tender remembrance. A true father is the best earthly friend. But the earthly significance of the word "father" does not exhaust the meaning of this blessed name; it is but a mere shadow of that relationship which God sustains to us. God is our Father. To Him we owe our whole being from the very first moment of our existence and also our preservation up to this hour. Whatever we are and have and hold we must ascribe to the love and kindness of our Father in heaven.

Again, if He is our Father, we must be His children, and therefore we may go to Him and with all confidence and boldness ask Him as dear children ask their dear father. Now, if that is true, if God is our kind and loving Father, and if by faith we are His children, it follows that we are heirs of our Father's estate in heaven. And though all unbelievers reject that inheritance, all who believe in Jesus Christ will attain it.

Our heavenly Father surely has the power to make His promise true, for He is "in heaven," that is to say, He is the almighty God. The Father to whom we pray is the Exalted One, who dwells in the high and holy places from eternity. He possesses infinite power to aid and help us. He is our Refuge and our Fortress.

Prayer.

Lord God, heavenly Father, Thou art the Father of lights and the Father of mercies and the God of all consolation, the eternal Father, of whom and through whom and to whom are all things. In Christ Thou art our Father and the Father of all believers, whom Thou hast brought to the adoption of children, and into whose hearts Thou hast sent the Spirit of Thy Son, teaching them to cry, "Abba, Father." Thou art our Father in heaven, and therefore we lift up our souls in prayer unto Thee and come to Thee with all boldness and confidence. Amen.

Starting forth on life's rough way,
  Father, guide us;
Oh, we know not what of harm
  May betide us;
'Neath the shadow of Thy wing,
  Father, hide us;
Walking through this world, we pray,
  Go beside us.

216. We Should Thank God that He Made Us His Children.

Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us that we should be called the sons of God! *1 John 3, 1.*

God made us His children. "He hath sent forth His Son, born of a woman, made under the Law, that we might receive the adoption of sons." "Because ye are sons, He hath sent the Spirit of His Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father." By nature, in our natural condition, we are not His children. But in Christ, God has redeemed mankind; in Christ's name, having the Spirit of His Son, we say, "Abba, Father." "For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ." Already when you were baptized, God came to you and made you His child and an heir of eternal life. This should help us to put all our trust in God.

Behold what love the father has bestowed upon us by making us His children! In Christ all believers are the children of God. The heavenly Father will, of course, be kind and loving to His children. Remember this at all times. It will strengthen your faith, and it will help you to do His will and to refuse to follow all temptations to sin. Luther most beautifully says: "God would by these words tenderly invite us to believe that He is our true Father and that we are His true children, so that we may with all boldness and confidence ask Him as dear children ask their dear father." Yes, God made us His children and heirs of salvation.

Oh, how we should thank Him for that! But do you ask *in what manner* you should thank Him? I answer, By always returning to your heavenly Father as often as you go astray. Behold the great love of the Father that we should be called His dear children, clad in the white robes of the righteousness of His dear Son. Oh, let the love of God induce you to walk in love, as the followers of God! "Do good to all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." These are your brethren and sisters in Christ, and God is their heavenly Father.

Prayer.

Lord God, we thank Thee for Thy great love and mercy that Thou didst make us Thy children. Enable us, we pray Thee, to come to Thee with humble mien and yet boldness and great confidence, as to a Father, a kind and loving Father, and with the encouraging assurance that we have an Advocate with Thee, who has told us that Thou, our Father, lovest us. Help us to serve Thee by leading a Christian life out of gratitude to Thee. Have compassion upon us and help us for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Praise to the Lord, who doth visibly bless and defend thee;
Who from the heavens the streams of His mercy doth send thee;
Ponder anew
What the Almighty can do,
If with His love He befriend thee.

We have no refuge, none on earth to aid us,
Save Thee, O Father, who Thine own hast made us;
But Thy dear presence will not leave them lonely
Who seek Thee only.

217. Become as Little Children in Simplicity of Faith and in Trustful Confidence.

Verily I say unto you, Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.
Matt. 18, 3.

When ambitious thoughts of ruling entered into the hearts of the disciples, Jesus gave them an answer such as they needed. He took a little child and set him in the midst of them. His object was to rebuke the sinful ambition of the disciples and to teach them a lesson of humility.

The ambition of each disciple was to be the greatest in Christ's kingdom. But the Lord assured them that, if they would not abandon these lofty thoughts, if they would not become small in their own estimation, they could not even enter His kingdom, much less rule in it.

Little children are quick to believe, and they implicitly believe what their father says. If a father tells a child something which it cannot understand and which seems incredible to him, he may argue for a little while, but he is sure to accept his father's word. Oh, if we grown people could only believe with such simplicity of faith as little children do! But this is the very thing we must learn to do; we must become as little children and never question the Word of our Father in heaven; we must not doubt a single word of His, whether we understand it or not.

Another chief feature of a child's humility consists in this, that he trusts his father and mother and not himself. He looks to father and mother for everything — clothing, shoes, food, toys. He trust mother's love even when she is punishing him. He is sure that his father knows the way home and will take him there. As a child trusts his father and mother, so we should put our trust in our Father in heaven. Cares we should not cherish, but cast them upon God and let Him care for us. Worry and anxiety about food and raiment should not be in our hearts, but we should firmly believe that our Father will make the necessary provision for His children. And we should never murmur because of the rod that strikes us, but rather climb into the Father's lap and embrace Him. And if we cannot see the way, our Father knows, and He will bring us safely to our eternal home.

Prayer.

Dear Father in heaven, Thou hast sent Thine own Son, who taught us how to pray, giving us the very words which we should use. According to this prayer we may call Thee our Father and ourselves Thy children. We humbly beseech Thee, let our hearts become like those of little children, let simplicity of faith and unwavering confidence reign in them. Let us never despise Thy command nor doubt Thy promise. Guide us with Thy counsel and afterwards receive us into glory. Amen.

Father, since of Zion's city
Happy children we became,
Let the world deride or pity,
We trust simply in Thy name.
Fading is the worldling's pleasure,
All his boasted pomp and show;
Solid joys and lasting treasure
None but Zion's children know.

218. Hallowed Be Thy Name.

Sanctify them through Thy truth; Thy Word is truth. *John 17, 17.*

What is God's name? It is that by which He wants us to know Him. Every page of the Bible makes known to us His name, His works, and His will. Especially in Christ Jesus has He revealed Himself to us. Yea, in Christ God has become our dear heavenly Father; that is His name, with which we are allowed to address Him in the Lord's Prayer. In Christ, God has become our Emmanuel, as it is written: "They shall call His name Emmanuel, which, being interpreted, is, God with us." In Christ, God has become our Savior and Redeemer. We now call Him by the sweet name of Jesus; but he that calls and sees Jesus sees and calls in Him also the Father. This is the name of God, of which Peter said: "There is none other name under heaven given among men whereby we must be saved." This is the blessed name which has the promise: "Whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved." Of this name of God or the Lord Jesus Christ we pray in the First Petition of the Lord's Prayer that it may be hallowed, that it may be kept holy, that is, we should hold it sacred among us and others, and thus magnify the glory of God on earth.

How is God's name hallowed? By pure doctrine and holy life we hallow the name of God. When the Word of God is taught in its truth and purity, without omissions and without additions, then the name of God shines among us in all its heavenly brightness. And when we, as the children of God, also lead a holy life according to the Word of God; when not only our doctrine is pure, but also our lives are godly and Christian in deed and in truth, then the name of God is seen on our face and in our whole life, that also others become willing to accept our testimony and together with us praise the holy name of God. However, by false doctrine and ungodly life the holy name of God is profaned. From this preserve us, O heavenly Father!

Prayer.

O heavenly Father, let Thy Word dwell richly among Thy children, and may they daily grow in grace and in the knowledge of salvation! And may we by the power of Thy Holy Spirit be strengthened unto every good word and work. Teach us to hallow and praise and glorify Thee in all Thy great and manifold works; and enable us so to order our whole life, our thoughts, our words, and our deeds, that Thy name may not be profaned and blasphemed, neither by us nor through any fault of ours, but receive due honor and praise; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

Thy name be hallowed! Help us, Lord,
To keep in purity Thy Word
And lead according to Thy name
A holy life, untouched by blame;
Let no false teachings do us hurt,
All poor deluded souls convert.

219. Thy Kingdom Come.

Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. *John 3, 5.*

What is this kingdom? It is a spiritual kingdom, and it comes in a spiritual way from the Spirit of God to the spirit of man. Each and every Christian belongs to this kingdom through faith in Christ. It is called the Kingdom of Grace because it is ruled by grace.

And how does this kingdom come? When a man by faith has accepted Christ, the kingdom of God is within him; then he submits to Christ as his Lord and King; then Christ lives and reigns in his heart. It is our Father's good pleasure to give us the Kingdom. How? Luther says: "When our heavenly Father gives us His Holy Spirit, so that by His grace we believe His holy Word." The Holy Spirit, through His holy Word, imparts to us what Christ has obtained for us; He illumines us and strengthens our faith according to the working of His mighty power. Thus the kingdom of God is within us. But it cannot remain hidden; it becomes manifest. Therefore Luther declares of the subjects of this kingdom that they "lead a godly life, here in time and hereafter in eternity." The kingdom of God begins here in time, here on earth. By faith we have righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost. But those who have served their Lord and King here in time have the promise: "Come, ye blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world." Then the righteous will come into the Kingdom of Glory.

What do we ask in this petition? We pray in this petition that the kingdom of God may come unto us also. "We ask that God would graciously grant us true faith and godly life, that He would extend His Kingdom of Grace on earth and hasten the advent of His Kingdom of Glory." The petition, "Thy kingdom come," is a constant reminder that many people are yet in darkness and that we should help them by bringing the Gospel of their Savior Jesus Christ to them.

Prayer.

O Lord, Thou King of kings, who hast called us into Thy kingdom, we beseech Thee to govern us at all times by Thy Word and Spirit that we may be Thine and that no man may pluck us out of Thy hands. Extend the borders of Thy kingdom and bring many from darkness to light, that Thou alone mayest be worshiped on earth. Let us, Thy subjects, live soberly, righteously, and godly in this present world, so that we may finally, together with all saints, attain unto the joys of Thy heavenly kingdom; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Oh, then will be the rapture,
Oh, then will be the song,
Oh, then will be the symphony
Of heaven's angelic throng,
When Christ His bride, His chosen,
Unto Himself shall bring,
Without one spot or wrinkle,
Meet partner for the King.

220. Take a Lively Interest in the Work for God's Kingdom.

Cursed be he that doeth the work of the Lord negligently.
Jer. 48, 10.

"Thy kingdom come," is a trumpet call to action. It arouses us from the stupor of indifference and urges us to defend and extend the limits of God's Kingdom of Grace. Jesus said, "No man, having put his hand to the plow and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God." And again He said: "I must work the works of Him that sent Me while it is day; the night cometh, when no man can work." We are warned, Amos 6, 1: "Woe unto them that are at ease in Zion!" We read in the Book of Judges, 5, 23: "Curse ye Meroz, said the Angel of the Lord, curse ye bitterly the inhabitants thereof, because they came not to the help of the Lord, to the help of the Lord against the mighty."

The kingdom of God can come without you, but woe unto you if it must come without you! Christ prepared the supper, but He sent out His servants to bid the people come and eat. Christ fed the five thousand, but He made use of the lad with the five loaves and two fishes. If you have not ten talents, you must not bury in a napkin the one talent given you. Rather make good use of it. Make the very best of it. Take a lively interest in the work for God's kingdom. When the church-paper coming into your home is filled with important news gathered from God's kingdom, laying open snares in doctrine and pitfalls in morals, reporting the progress of our missionaries, the difficulties that vex our Synod, and many other things, — do you read it? Are you interested in these things? Why, it is our duty to know about these things, to consider them carefully, and to rejoice over each success with which the work in God's kingdom has been blessed. The real purpose of our existence is not to live unto ourselves, but to live a life of genuine self-sacrifice for the glory of God and the temporal and eternal welfare of our fellow-creatures, to which the love of Christ ought to constrain us.

Prayer.

Dearest Father in heaven, do not count the old sins against me unto my damnation and do not in Thy wrath remember my former transgressions, but graciously forgive and forget them because of the suffering and death of Thy dearly beloved Son. Protect Thy beloved Church and pour out Thy blessings upon her.

Confound and defeat the machinations of her enemies. Clothe her ministers with righteousness and truth. Accompany the means of grace with the mighty working of Thy Holy Spirit. Amen.

Savior, come and bring salvation,
Chase away the lingering night,
Pour Thy beams on every nation,
Bless the world with heavenly light.
  Let Thy glory
Fill the earth from pole to pole
  Till Thy story
Wakens love in every soul.

221. Thy Will be Done on Earth as It Is in Heaven.

He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the Day of Jesus Christ. *Phil. 1, 6.*

Luther says: "The good and gracious will of God is done indeed without our prayer; but we pray in this petition that it may be done among us also." God's will should be done among us too. In heaven His will is done; on earth His will is often not done. Therefore Christ teaches us to pray: "Thy will be done."

What is this good and gracious will of God? We read John 6, 40: "This is the will of Him that sent Me, that every one which seeth the Son and believeth on Him may have everlasting life." God's good and gracious will is that we should be saved through faith in Christ Jesus. How does God do this? "When God breaks and hinders every evil counsel and will which would not let us hallow God's name nor let His kingdom come, such as the will of the devil, the world, and our flesh; but strengthens and preserves us steadfast in His Word and faith unto our end. This is His gracious and good will." According to these words of our Catechism there is a triple alliance opposing God's will. The three conspirers are the devil, the world, and our flesh. These three are always in opposition to God's will.

Therefore we must daily pray: "Thy will be done." Break, O Lord, the plans and schemes of that alliance. "Thy will be done," that is to say, it behooves us to do Thy will. When our sinful will would cross God's holy will, God is asked to change our will, so that it will accord with His will. "Thy will be done"; thereby we pledge ourselves to learn the will of God and not to mistake our own whims and notions for God's will. "Thy will be done" — or the devil's. This is a terrible alternative, but there is no other. If we refuse to do God's will, we are doing Satan's will. We should do God's will as it is done by the angels in heaven, day and night, gladly, cheerfully, and as best we can.

Prayer.

Almighty and ever-living God, who makest us both to will and to do those things which are good and acceptable unto Thy divine majesty, let Thy fatherly hand, we beseech Thee, ever be over us, let Thy Holy Spirit ever be with us, and so lead us in the knowledge and obedience of Thy Word that in the end we may obtain everlasting life. Make us perfect in every good work to do Thy will, working in us that which is well-pleasing in Thy sight, through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Commit whatever grieves thee
At heart, and all thy ways,
To Him who never leaves thee,
On whom creation stays;
Who freest courses maketh
For clouds and air and wind,
And who care ever taketh
A path for thee to find.

222. God's Gracious Will when He Afflicts Us with Illness.

Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? And one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. *Matt. 10, 29. 30.*

No disease can come to our door, no illness can touch us, without the will and permission of our heavenly Father. When we are afflicted with illness, we may find some natural cause and even blame ourselves for not taking proper care of our health; but we must know that everything is done under the ruling and guidance of Him who taught us to pray: "Thy will be done."

It is principally our spiritual treatment which God has in view when He afflicts us with illness. His intention is that we should learn to trust in Him alone and expect help solely from Him. "Thy will be done," — saying this, we pledge ourselves to suffer the will of God, whatever He may send us, whether it is pleasant or unpleasant. "If any man suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God on this behalf."

"Thy will be done," this we must always say in our prayers, no matter how dark and dreary the prospects may seem. In the day of trouble we must think of something more than the mere earthly and temporal aspect of the trouble; we should think of God, who permitted it to touch us and who guides its course. Then amid our sufferings and afflictions we hear the voice of the Savior: "Be of good cheer, it is I."

And how graciously does He comfort us when He afflicts us with illness! Paul suffered from a physical ailment and prayed to be relieved from it. Thrice he besought the Lord that it might depart from him. But what was the response? "My grace is sufficient for thee; for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And so you may have an ailment from which you desire to be relieved, but God deems it best for you to keep it. Then do not think that He does not mean well with you. You are His dear child in spite of that ailment. "All things work together for good to them that love God." It is His loving-kindness that leads us.

Prayer.

O God, who seest that of ourselves we have no strength, keep us both outwardly and inwardly that we may be defended from all adversities which may happen to the body, and from all evil thoughts which may assault and hurt the soul. If it is Thy will, however, that we should bear the cross, help us to bear it that we may not despair in the day of trouble. When our heart is bowed down and our soul is heavy, may Thy Word and Spirit comfort us; let the example of Thy dear Son, who suffered so willingly, induce us to bear our own cross without murmuring; and finally lead us to pleasures at Thy right hand forevermore. Amen.

There shall we bathe our weary soul
In seas of heavenly rest
And not a wave of trouble roll
Across our peaceful breast.

223. Give Us This Day Our Daily Bread.

Seek ye first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added unto you. *Matt. 6, 33.*

"All these things" — what things? Our daily bread; for bread is a term of wide meaning. Luther explains it thus: "Everything that belongs to the support and wants of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, fields, cattle, money, goods, a pious spouse, pious children, pious servants, pious and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, discipline, honor, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like." For all this, just as every one needs it for his daily life, the Lord Jesus teaches us to pray in the words of the Fourth Petition: "Give us this day our daily bread." We are to include in the term bread all the necessaries of life.

We pray for *daily* bread because to have what we need each day should be sufficient unto us. We should not pray for riches and more than we need, knowing that godliness with contentment is great gain. Be satisfied with the portion allotted to you. It is sufficient to have what you need each day. If God, however, does give you more than you need, remember Ps. 62, 10: "If riches increase, set not your heart upon them."

We should pray: "Give us this day *our* daily bread." We should not covet any bread which is not our rightful bread, which God has not given to us. As long as we can, we should, each in his own vocation, earn our bread by the labor of our hands and not eat other people's bread. Christ teaches us to pray for our own bread. Paul admonishes the Thessalonians to work, saying: "If any would not work, neither should he eat. For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ that with quietness they *work and eat their own bread.*" Sweet is the bread of honest independence. We therefore ask for willingness, wisdom, and strength to toil, as also for the God-given fruit of our labor. And when God gives us more than we need, "is it not to deal thy bread to the hungry," the needy?

Prayer.

Almighty God, whose are all things in heaven and earth, who hast made all and dost preserve all, we thank Thee for giving us life and health and all that belongs to the support and wants of the body. Give us daily the bread we need, and having food and raiment, let us be therewith content and let us prudently husband our store that we may employ it in Thy fear and to Thy glory in furthering Thy kingdom and relieving our neighbor's want. And as Thou dost sustain our bodily life, may our souls daily be fed with the manna of Thy holy Word, until Thou wilt make us to sit at Thy heavenly table, for the sake of Thy dear Son Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

Through each perplexing path of life
Our wandering footsteps guide.
Give us each day our daily bread
And raiment fit provide.

224. Beware of the Cares of This Life!

Having food and raiment, let us be therewith content. *1 Tim. 6, 8.*

The unbelieving children of this world have their minds fixed on nothing but the things of this world. Their sole desire is to enjoy this life, to have a good time, to eat, drink, and be merry, and to obtain wealth, to acquire an abundance of earthly possessions. These are the things which occupy their minds day and night. And how restless are they in the chase after riches! How do they scheme in order that they may obtain this world's goods and enjoy them! How often are they led by their craving for wealth and pleasure to deviate from the path of honesty, to resort to unlawful means, to trickery and fraud, to burden their consciences, and to make themselves miserable! They are ensnared in the cares of this life. And where does this earthly-mindedness lead to? The apostle says: "Whose end is destruction." Eternal damnation is the goal for which they are making.

Oh, beware, then, of the cares of this life! Provide for your immortal soul! Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness! Christians must not be earthly-minded; their hearts and hopes are to be fixed above. Heart and mind should ever become more loosed, disengaged, from the things of this world, and our longing for the world to come should continually increase and grow. It is true that we must to a certain extent occupy our minds also with earthly things, inasmuch as we must live and provide for our own temporal welfare and that of others; but our true home is in heaven. There are things of much higher importance than the things of this present life — the things that are above, the things that can make us truly happy. Earthly things cannot make us truly happy. True happiness surely cannot dwell in the hearts of those who have no higher aim than to receive their good things in their lifetime and occupy their minds with nothing but earthly things. Truly happy are they who are *in* the world, but not *of* the world. Happy are the faithful Christians who are heavenly-minded.

Prayer.

Almighty God, teach us that our labor is in vain except Thou bless it in order that we may ask Thee for Thy gifts. Preserve us from fears springing from lack of trust in Thee and from worldly anxieties, that we may labor for our necessities in this life, like the birds of the air and the lilies of the field, without care. Let us be diligent in the work of our calling, and yet not from covetousness or the desire to gain wealth, but from obedience to Thee, that we may so pass through things temporal that we shall not lose the things eternal. Amen.

Now is the time of grace;
Now heaven's gates stand open;
Now every sinner has
Eternal life before him.
Who lets this time pass by
And not to God doth turn,
Let him bewail himself
When he in hell must burn.

225. We Should Receive God's Gifts with Thanksgiving.

O give thanks unto the Lord, for He is good; because His mercy endureth forever. *Ps. 118, 1.*

Luther says: "God gives daily bread, indeed, without our prayers, also to all the wicked; but we pray in this petition that He would lead us to know it and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving." Although God grants these gifts and blessings even to the ungodly, yet He desires us to pray for these things in order that we may acknowledge that we receive them from His bountiful hand and see in them His fatherly goodness toward us.

If we look at all the creatures of God, we cannot but see the goodness of God. Christ says of our Father in heaven: "He maketh His sun to rise on the evil and on the good and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust"; as though He would say: God sends down blessings in great streams and showers, but who thanks Him for it? He gives your and my eyes the faculty to see and distinguish things; but nobody regards this as a gift of God. If the sun would not rise of a morning, or if it should delay for only half a day to mount above the horizon, oh, what misery and wretchedness would then ensue! How everybody would complain and cry for relief! And after the rising of the sun on that day everybody would exclaim: Thanks and praise be to God for setting up such a great light for us! But because the sun rises every day at the right time, no one considers it a blessing and a great gift of God. And thus it is with regard to all other blessings of God — the rain, the grain in the fields, and thousands of other gifts. The good gifts are too many, blessings are poured down upon and round about us daily, and for that reason we do not realize that they do not "just happen," but that they *are blessings,* undeserved blessings. Alas, how little gratitude is rendered to the Giver of every good and perfect gift! How many homes, how many hearts, as regards praise and thanks to God, are as silent as the grave!

"O give thanks unto the Lord!" says the psalmist. And again, Ps. 50, 14: "Offer unto God thanksgiving." We should receive God's gifts with thanksgiving.

Prayer.

O Thou faithful Father in heaven, teach us to receive Thy gifts with thanksgiving. We, thy children, heartily wish we could render unto Thee adequate thanks and praise for all the blessings Thou hast bestowed upon us during all the days of our lives up to this hour. But, alas! this is not within our power. Thou dost daily grant us blessings without measure, for all which we thank Thee from our inmost hearts. Amen.

For all the blessings of the day;
For hours to work and hours to play;
For courage and contentment here;
For trust to strengthen, joy to cheer;
For sleep and all the duties done;
For every strife of conscience won;
For home and those who love us there;
For friend and kindred everywhere;
For all Thy love made manifest;
For life and for eternal rest —
We thank Thee, Lord.

226. It Is Foolish and Heathenish to Torture Ourselves with Care for the Future.

Take, therefore, no thought for the morrow; for the morrow shall take thought for the things of itself. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof. *Matt. 6, 34.*

There can be no doubt that much valuable time is squandered in needless worry. A great many people worry much about the future, saying: "What shall we eat?" or, "What shall we drink?" or, "Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" They worry about all that we generally understand by daily bread. This makes their lives sad and sorrowful.

The Lord tells us: "Take no thought for the morrow." Jesus is concerned, not only with our spiritual, but also with our bodily welfare. He would like to see us free from cares and troubles in this life. He means to say: Why do you want to make yourselves miserable by seeing future troubles? Why load down your souls with the cares and fears that belong to another day? Why be your own tormentors and make your life in this world still darker and more unpleasant than it already is by thinking of imaginary troubles, troubles which perhaps will never come? And even if they should come, is it not bad enough to have to bear them when they are here? Why worry beforehand and make each day more burdensome than necessary by carrying the troubles of yesterday into the cares for to-morrow? "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof." It is foolish and heathenish to torture ourselves with care for the future.

Therefore, away with these cares! Trust in God, who had His beloved Son Jesus Christ die for your sins. Believe in His Word and promise that He will not leave thee nor forsake thee. And thus you will always be able to say: "The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want." "Cast thy burden upon the Lord," the psalmist says. And 1 Pet. 5, 7 you are admonished to "cast all your care upon Him; for He careth for you." Cast *all* your care upon Him if you would enjoy blessedness unshadowed in the future. "He careth for you." If there is any caring to be done, He will do it. In all our troubles He cares for us, and He makes them work together for our eternal good.

Prayer.

O Lord God, let Thy blessing — on which all depends — ever attend our efforts, so that we may bring them to a successful issue, without impairing the interests of others, in order that our substance may be devoted to Thy honor and that the members of our family be provided for. Cause Thy blessing, we pray Thee, to increase as time goes on; bless our basket and our store. O Lord, shut out from our hearts all care and worry; grant that we may trust in Thee alone and never doubt Thy promise. Make our hearts glad and our faces joyful; grant us health, life, and success. To Thee we commit our way; we trust also in Thee; Thou wilt bring it to pass. O Lord, we praise Thee. Amen.

We praise Thee with the dawning day,
To Thee at even also pray;
With our poor song we worship Thee
Now, ever, and eternally.

227. And Forgive Us Our Trespasses, as We Forgive Those who Trespass Against Us.

If ye do not forgive, neither will your Father which is in heaven forgive your trespasses. *Mark 11, 26.*

Fourthly we prayed for our daily bread and spoke of the needs of our body and how they are satisfied by our Father in heaven. After supply of food, forgiveness of sins is asked for in order that he who is fed by God may live in God.

To have our body well provided for does not make us truly happy; we must also, yes, above all, look after the welfare of our soul. Thus the Fourth and the Fifth Petition are closely related; the Lord joins them with "and," saying, "*And* forgive us our trespasses." Before we are able to enjoy life rightly, our Father's displeasure must be removed, we must be delivered from a heavy burden, our sins must be forgiven. But to obtain forgiveness of sins, we must go to God. For "who can forgive sins but God only?" To Him, therefore, who has become our dear Father for Jesus' sake we must look up for help in our sins and spiritual distress. "We pray in this petition that our Father in heaven would not look upon our sins nor on their account deny our prayer; for we are worthy of none of the things for which we pray, neither have we deserved them, but that He would grant them all to us by grace; for we daily sin much and indeed deserve nothing but punishment."

How, then, can He forgive us? Jesus Himself, who taught us to pray: "Forgive us our trespasses," opened the way to forgiveness. He made forgiveness possible when He bore our sins on the tree. He redeemed us and became the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world. And He bids us ask in His name: "Forgive us our trespasses."

This petition is meant for penitent sinners, who are alarmed and terrified on account of their sins, seek God's forgiveness, and have the good and earnest purpose with the aid of God to mend their sinful lives. And in grateful acknowledgment of the forgiveness received, they also heartily forgive those who offend them and readily do good to those who sin against them.

Prayer.

O almighty God, we thank Thee that for Thy dear Son's sake Thou hast forgiven us all our trespasses and hast graciously delivered us from the eternal prison-house. We beseech Thee, keep us from ingratitude and wickedness, lest we again provoke Thy anger; but grant us grace readily to forgive those who trespass against us and to take the first step in reconciling our neighbor, mercifully extending the hand of peace and forgiveness. O Lord, turn our hearts to do so. Amen.

Turn Thou us, and we shall be turned;
Thou didst bring back of old
Thy straying people when they yearned
To find their proper fold.
So now forgive what we have done,
Pray, for the sake of Thy dear Son.
Thy Holy Spirit be our Guide
And to our end with us abide.

228. And Lead Us Not into Temptation.

Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation: the spirit indeed is willing, but the flesh is weak. *Matt. 26, 41.*

God's temptations are intended only for our welfare; they are a test, which is to strengthen our faith and make us strong to fight against evil. Abraham was tempted in this way when God told him to take his son Isaac and offer him for a burnt offering. Philip was tried in the same way when Christ asked him where they would buy enough bread to feed five thousand men besides women and children. Job was sorely tempted, but also for the same purpose. The temptations with which Christians are afflicted are fiery trials, by which God tries them in order to purify their faith. Then they learn: "Blessed is the man that endureth temptation; for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love Him." Temptation is necessary. As the body is exercised and strengthened, as the mind is trained and developed, so the soul is disciplined and strengthened through temptation. Temptation is a course of training prescribed by God, our heavenly Physician, for the development of our spiritual life. The temptations, then, that come from God are not for evil, but for good; He tests us to benefit our soul.

Why, then, do we pray to God: "And lead us not into temptation"? "We pray in this petition that God would guard and keep us, so that the devil, the world, and our flesh may not deceive us nor seduce us into misbelief, despair, and other great shame and vice; and though we be assailed by them, that still we may finally overcome and obtain the victory." That is the reason why the Lord did not end His prayer with the Fifth Petition. When the old sins are forgiven and our hearts are full of joy, there is still more for which we must pray. For in this life we are beset by the enemies of our soul, the devil, the world, and our flesh. They do not want us to rejoice in God, our Savior; they desire to have us serve sin and not God. Therefore we must fight the good fight of faith; we must strive with mighty foes. Shall we stand firm in this strife? We ask the Lord, "Lead us not into temptation." We beseech Him to give us strength to overcome and finally to obtain the victory.

Prayer.

Almighty God, who knowest us to be set in the midst of so many and great dangers that by reason of the frailty of our nature we cannot always stand upright, grant us such strength and protection as may support us in all dangers and carry us through all temptations. Keep us through the power of the Holy Spirit that we may firmly and steadfastly resist the enemies we have renounced, the devil, the world, sin, and our own flesh, and obtain the victory over all of them. Hear us, O Father of mercies, that we may yield Thee praise and thanks forevermore, through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord. Amen.

When through fiery trials thy pathway shall lie,
My grace, all-sufficient, shall be thy supply.
The flame shall not hurt thee; I only design
Thy dross to consume and thy gold to refine.

229. Avoid Bad Company.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly nor standeth in the way of sinners nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. *Ps. 1, 1.*

Avoid the company of the children of this world. Avoid the many snares and pitfalls that surround you daily. Avoid the haunts of the ungodly, where there is to be found cursing, corrupt speech, gambling, and drinking. Avoid dances. "Have you ever seen two persons doing the modern waltz? Have you ever noted their positions? Why, fifty years ago, if a young man had tried to dance that way, he would have been shot. Society would have shunned him. The doors of all good homes would have been locked against him." These are the words of an aged dancing-master. He is disgusted with the modern dance. And what are we *Christians* to say about the immoral and immodest dances now in vogue? And what of the theater and the movies? Says the owner of a theater: "Many dramas are morbid and unclean, many of the melodramas personated each year are schools of crime; they actually make criminals." The bill-boards lining the streets and avenues of our cities are full of immoral, spectacular, nude figures, demoralizing scenery, presented on the stages of all grades, from the highest to the lowest. If modesty must avert its gaze from them, what must be the final consequences of sitting and gazing for hours on the living presentation, which, no doubt, is worse?

How many an earnest Christian had escaped the most cunning temptations of the devil, and a coarse, bungled attempt took him unawares and brought about his fall. He got into bad company; his faith was shaken; his conviction was not deeply rooted; he was not prepared for the evil hour. "And lead us not into temptation," — in this prayer we are reminded of our own weakness; we are warned against bringing on temptations, against going where they will confront us directly. We have the word of God: "Enter not into the path of the wicked and go not in the way of evil men. Avoid it, pass not by it, turn from it, and pass away." "Keep thy heart with all diligence." Prov. 4, 14. 15. 23. Bad company must be avoided if you would save your soul.

Prayer.

Lord God, Holy Spirit, incline the heart of every wayward child to that which is good, renew his mind, lead his feet into the path of true godliness again, and turn him, so that he may henceforth walk the way of Thy commandments to do them. Grant him grace to forsake the company of the wicked and, like the prodigal son, to long to come back and say: I have sinned against Thee, O Father in heaven, and am not worthy to be called Thy son. Then there will be joy in heaven, among the angels of God, over this sinner who has returned to God. And then he will also with all his powers praise and extol God for His mercy in time and eternity. Amen.

Lord Jesus, unto Thee I live;
Lord Jesus, unto Thee I die;
Lord Jesus, Thine I am
Living or dying. Amen.

230. But Deliver Us from Evil.

The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom. *2 Tim. 4, 18.*

We pray in the Seventh Petition, as the sum of all, that our Father in heaven would deliver us from every evil of body and soul, property and honor. In his Large Catechism Luther writes: "In the Greek text this petition reads thus: Deliver or preserve us from the Evil One, or the Malicious One; and it looks as if He were speaking of the devil, as though He would comprehend everything in one, so that the entire substance of all our prayer is directed against our chief enemy. For it is he who hinders among us everything that we pray for: the name or honor of God, God's kingdom and will, our daily bread, a cheerful, good conscience, etc. All the evil in the world comes from the Evil One. Satan came and carried discord into Paradise. He seduced Eve to sin, and woe began. The Evil One brought all evil with him."

The Greek word here rendered "deliver" means to break chains, loose bands, take away. We feel the fetters of evil and cannot get away from them. "With might of ours can naught be done, soon were our loss effected." We pray to God: "But deliver us from evil." We confess our faith in God's help. We ask that God either spare us many evils or at least give us strength to bear our cross and turn it to our benefit. And daily, in thousands of cases, He entirely spares us many evils. Often, when misery is trying to consume us, He delivers us; when we are exposed to bodily and spiritual perils, He snatches us away from the roaring lion. Often, after suffering dire sickness for many years, when we had almost despaired of our becoming well again, He notwithstanding helped us and gave us back health and strength, so that we could sing: "Who redeemeth thy life from destruction."

We pray that God would "finally, when our last hour has come, grant us a blessed end and graciously take us from this vale of tears to Himself in heaven." The "last hour" is the hour which seems to be the blackest of all evils; but through it we Christians enter into the Kingdom of Glory.

Prayer.

Merciful God, faithful Father, the Giver of every good and perfect gift, who in Thy wise and gracious providence dost lay crosses upon Thy children, chastening those whom Thou lovest that their faith may be strengthened in the fiery trial: we praise Thy righteous judgments and Thy goodness and beseech Thee to have mercy upon all that are in affliction and distress. Deliver us from the Evil One, enable us to resist him and to obtain the victory. Defend us from all evil that may affect us in our body, property, or honor. Finally deliver us from all trials and receive us into heavenly bliss. Amen.

If the way be drear,
If the foe be near,
Let no faithless fears o'ertake us;
Let not faith and hope forsake us;
For through many a woe
To our home we go.

231. What are God's Intentions when He Suffers Us to Endure Evil?

Now, no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous; nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby. *Heb. 12, 11.*

The first intention of God when He suffers His children to endure afflictions is to make them humble, to keep them from pride, to make them aware of the fact that they are but damnable sinners in the sight of their God, so that they will remain in the narrow way, which leads to eternal life, and not exalt themselves and come to eternal ruin. The apostle therefore says: "When we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord that we should not be condemned with the world." This is the first intention of God when He suffers us to endure afflictions.

Another purpose is that we should not seek our own glory in what we have done for Christ, but glorify God alone and cling to His grace. Our afflictions should disclose to us that we are but frail creatures, that we are as nothing before God and that He is everything. These afflictions, then, are not to be looked upon as evidences of divine anger. How should God be angry with His dear children, who believe in His dear Son? Neither does God afflict us to make us suffer for our sins. We have no sins to suffer for. Our sins are all forgiven. Jesus did all the suffering for us when He died on the cross for our transgressions. No; God sends us trials and tribulations from pure fatherly love, to keep us from losing our faith. It would be impossible for us to keep the faith in this world of temptations if God would not come to our assistance. *The days of affliction must prove and improve our faith.* When there is nothing in sight to support us, we must rely on the promise of our God that He will not forsake us. When there is no help, then we must look to the Lord alone for help. When Death stretches out his hand, then you must confidently lean upon Christ. Such are God's ways with His children when he desires to strengthen their faith. He suffers them to endure afflictions. "We must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God."

Prayer.

O Lord, almighty God and heavenly Father, protect me and mine from a sudden evil death, from disaster brought on by fire or water, from pestilence and all manner of ills. I commend myself, my body, my soul, and all I have to Thy fatherly protection; Thy holy angel be with me that I need fear no ill. When I am comfortless and my heart is filled with nothing but anxiety, then let me flee to Thee, O Lord, and seek comfort for my despairing heart in Thy life-giving Word. After I have fought the good fight of faith and finished my course, I shall understand Thy wonderful ways which now are dark to me; and then I will praise Thee for guiding me as Thou didst. Amen.

I cannot read His purpose
Nor solve each mystery;
But all He sends is kindness,
And that does comfort me.

232. The Conclusion of the Lord's Prayer.

Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty; for all that is in the heavens and in the earth is Thine; Thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and Thou art exalted as Head above all. *1 Chron. 29, 11.*

All creatures must confess: "For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever."

"Thine is the kingdom." These words recognize God in His radiant majesty and absolute sovereignty over the whole world. We avow to our heavenly Father that He alone is the Lord and King, with whom we should seek help. We pray that He would hear our prayer and grant our petition because His is the kingdom, and His are its resources. We pray for things which pertain to His kingdom and therefore expect Him to hear us.

We further pray: *"Thine is the power."* God, the very Father in heaven, to whom we should pray and whom we should worship and serve, is the one great Being to whom every power on earth, in heaven, and in hell must submit and before whom even the greatest men must finally bow their knees in fear and dread. Now, if that is true, what an inducement to pray to Him! For He alone has the power to grant our petition. What an inducement to worship and serve Him! For if we walk beneath the shadow of His wings, there is no power on earth or in hell which may harm us, as He has assured us that against His will not one hair will fall from our heads. He has revealed His omnipotence by the work of creation, and He reveals it still in the preservation of the world. His power is infinitely great.

And so it is with God's glory. We pray: *"Thine is the glory."* Heaven and earth, by obeying God's laws, proclaim His divine glory. We say: "Now, unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honor and glory forever and ever!" All our desires are bound up in God's glory. The Lord's Prayer ends with the words: *"forever and ever. Amen."* Blessed be the Lord God from everlasting to everlasting! Our prayers end in praise. Thus they link the days of asking to the days of everlasting thanksgiving throughout all eternity.

Prayer.

Glory be to Thee, O God most holy! Glory be to Thee, O God most high! Glory be to Thee, O King of heaven and earth, who pitiest us as a father pities his children. Fill us with joy and gladness in the Holy Ghost, that, when Thou shalt render to every man according to his works, we may be found acceptable before Thee, through Him who has redeemed us from the shame and curse of sin, even Jesus Christ, our Lord and Redeemer. Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honor, and power, and might be unto Thee forever and ever! Thou art the Lord and King over all; Thy dominion endures through all generations. Amen.

> Forevermore the praise,
> The kingdom, power, belong
> To Thee; throughout eternal days
> Creation's endless song.

233. The Word "Amen."

All the promises of God in Him are yea and in Him Amen unto the glory of God by us. *2 Cor. 1, 20.*

The word "Amen" gathers up, as it were, the whole prayer and says, So shall it be. For what does this word mean? Luther answers: "That I should be certain that these petitions are acceptable to our Father in heaven and heard; for He Himself has commanded us so to pray and has promised to hear us. Amen, Amen, that is, yea, yea, it shall be so." This word teaches us how to pray the Lord's Prayer with implicit confidence. This word carries us into the future hopefully. With this word we shut the door against unbelief and doubt. Amen is a word of undoubting faith, showing that we are not uncertain as to whether we shall be heard or not, but are fully assured of being heard.

This is the boldness which we have towards Him: I know my prayer is heard; for God Himself commanded me to pray, and He has promised to hear my prayers. And has not my Savior taught me this prayer? Does not my Mediator make intercession for me? Do not all true children of God include me also when they pray: "Our Father who art in heaven"? Yea, "the Spirit also helpeth our infirmity." Surely, then, my petition must be acceptable to the Father in heaven and heard. "This is the confidence that we have in Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him." We must, therefore, close the door of our heart firmly against all doubt, and with a firm voice we should say, "Amen." "Let him ask in faith, nothing wavering."

There is something great about a Christian whose faith is firmly rooted. Such a Christian is like a bride who has full confidence in the love and faithfulness of her affianced. She is happy in knowing that he whom she loves will not deny her any request she may make. That is the very condition of a Christian whose faith is deeply rooted and firmly grounded, who has full confidence in the love and faithfulness of his heavenly Father.

Prayer.

O Thou faithful, eternal, and almighty God, grant us grace, we beseech Thee, at all times to come reverently before Thee and with all confidence to present our petitions to Thee; for with Thee nothing is impossible, and Thou hast promised to hear us. And graciously give unto us those things which we have faithfully asked according to Thy will, so that our necessity will be relieved and Thy name be glorified. We trust in Thee, O heavenly Father, though Thou smite us. Thou art our Light and our Salvation; whom should we fear? Thou hast said it, and Thy promise will not fail. Amen.

Amen! that is, So let it be.
Confirm our faith continually,
That we may doubt not, but believe
That what we ask we shall receive.
Thus in Thy name and at Thy word
We say: Amen; oh, hear us, Lord!

234. The Promise Given to Prayer.

Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in My name, He will give it you. *John 16, 23.*

Here the Lord not only makes the promise that the Father will grant our petition, but He repeats the promise and confirms it with an oath, "Verily, verily." Can we doubt His promise? Must we not believe the promises of our Savior and our God?

But why is it that many complain of their prayers being unheard? There are not a few who ask foolish or hurtful things. Prayer as only too often practised is a sin rather than a virtue. People say "Father," but there is no childlike confidence in their hearts. They add, "who art in heaven," but they do not speak and act as if they were in the presence of the Divine Majesty. They pray, but their every action clearly shows that without prayer they would be just as well supplied and just as happy. Prayer which deserves the name is a different thing. It is addressed to God and has a purpose, and he who speaks such a prayer trusts in Christ's grace and is confident of being answered.

Does it not frequently happen, however, that we pray for a certain thing, but fail to receive it? It does. But why? Because we prescribe to God the time and manner when and how He should help, or because we do not at once see the helping hand of God. True, God has promised to hear us, and some understand this to mean that they will receive whatever they ask for. A little reflection will show us, however, that this is setting bounds to the providence of God. If He promises to give us good gifts, He must also be permitted to judge what is good for us and to answer our prayers accordingly. God gives us everything that is truly good for us. But we must remember that He knows far better than we do what is truly good for us. And He surely hears our prayers and grants us that which is best for us.

Does God, then, really hear every proper prayer? Yes, but in His own manner and at His own good time. When Paul besought the Lord to take a certain heavy burden from him, He said: "My grace is sufficient for thee." At Cana the Lord said: "Mine hour is not yet come." Not yet, but it will come. What, therefore, is necessary? Persistence in prayer. In this the Canaanitish woman was a model.

Prayer.

Dear heavenly Father, we are poor, unworthy sinners, not fit to raise our eyes and hands to Thee in prayer. But because Thou hast commanded us to pray and hast promised to hear us, and because Thou hast given us both the words and the manner of prayer through Thy dear Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, while on earth, we confidently come to Thee in prayer and do not doubt that Thou wilt hear us. In Thy Son's name we come before Thee and offer our prayer, no matter who we are, confident that it is yea and Amen with Thee, that is, that it is surely heard. Glory be to Thy name that we may have this comforting assurance! Amen.

Glorious Lord, Thyself impart;
Light of Light, from God proceeding,
Open Thou our ears and heart,
Help us by Thy Spirit's pleading;
Hear the cry Thy people raises,
Hear and bless our prayers and praises.

235. The Means of Grace.

Teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. *Matt. 28, 19. 20.*

There is no promise that God will give us His gifts without means. There is no hope for those who despise the means of grace and will not use them. The means of grace not only tell of, but offer and give, God's grace. These means of grace are the Gospel and the Sacraments. "Preach the Gospel to every creature," is the clear command of Christ. The Gospel is a means of grace offering forgiveness to all. Where there is no Gospel, there is no forgiveness and no salvation. But the Lord's promise is clear: "Blessed are they that hear the Word of God and keep it." Our life is short and uncertain. The years flit by, and any day may be our last. Oh, be diligent in using the means of salvation which God has given! Hear the Word of God and receive it as His Word, which is able to save your soul.

And to this heavenly proclamation two sure seals are fixed: the Sacrament of Baptism and the Sacrament of the Lord's Supper. These Sacraments are a pledge and seal that divine grace is imparted to us. While the Word generally is addressed to all, in the Sacrament it comes to the individual and applies to him in particular the grace of God. At Pentecost, Peter said to the multitude: "Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost." He says: "Every one of you." If, therefore, you are not yet baptized, postpone it no longer. "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." And of the Lord's Supper we read: "This is My body; this is My blood of the New Testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins."

Now, this pardon, the remission of sins, must be appropriated and accepted by the individual sinner. What is promised must be believed; what is offered as a gift must be accepted. *Faith* is that act of the soul by which it confidently lays hold of the grace and mercy of God set forth in the means of grace.

Prayer.

O merciful God, blessed is the soul that is acceptable to Thee. Open my eyes that I may see the wonders of Thy institutions. Awaken my heart, increase my hope, render fervent my devotion, that I may hear Thy Word with due reverence, approach Thy table in cheerful confidence, and with a pure mouth, holy heart, and a heartfelt desire partake of Thy Sacrament to the blessing, life, and salvation of my soul. Help me to receive great blessings from the means of grace. Amen.

Let, O Jesus, I beseech Thee,
These Thy means take root in me;
Let these precious gifts enrich me
So that I bear fruit for Thee;
Take them never from my heart
Till I see Thee as Thou art.
When such honor Thou wilt show me,
I shall see and fully know Thee.

236. The Power of God's Word.

The Word of God is quick and powerful and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit and of the joints and marrow and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart. *Heb. 4, 12.*

Is there anything more powerful than the Word of God? When God said, "Let there be light," there was light. Heaven and earth were made by the word of God. And have we not been regenerated by the Word of God? Has it not made new creatures of us, whose hearts have been changed, and does it not continually perform miracles upon our souls, keeping us in the faith, enabling us to do the will of God, strengthening and comforting us in all afflictions? Behold, then, the great power of the Word of God!

The Holy Scriptures give us some remarkable instances of the effectiveness of preaching the Word of God. The most remarkable instance is the preaching of Peter at Pentecost. By this one sermon three thousand souls were converted to Christ. Many passages of the Holy Scriptures tell us that the preaching of the Word of God can produce such results at any time. Ps. 147, 15: "His Word runneth very swiftly." Paul says, Rom. 1, 16: "I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ; for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth."

A certain infidel doctor once said to a clergyman: "I am surprised that such an intelligent man as you are should believe in the Bible." The clergyman replied: "Twenty-five years ago I tried the power of God's grace. It made a different man of me. All these years I have preached salvation to others, and wherever it has been accepted, I have never known it to fail. I have seen it make the proud man humble, the drunken man temperate, the profane man pure in speech, the dishonest true. The rich and the poor, the learned and the unlearned, the old and the young, have alike been healed of their diseases." This answer convinced the doctor of the divine origin and the truths of the Bible, and to-day he is himself a devoted believer. Such is the power of God's Word.

How thankful we ought to be for the inestimable gift of the Word of God!

Prayer.

Grant, O Lord God, that we may carefully keep Thy words, commands, and directions, storing them in our heart and binding them about our neck, also accepting Thy corrections. Rule us, we pray Thee, by Thy good Spirit that we may yield to the power of Thy holy Word. Finally receive us into Thy glory. Strengthen us through the power of Thy Word to say with Paul: "I have a desire to depart and to be with Christ, which is far better." Let Thy Word be our shield and weapon. Amen.

A trusty weapon is Thy Word,
Thy Church's buckler, shield, and sword.
Lord, let us by this Word abide
That we may seek no other guide.

O grant that in Thy holy Word
We here may live and die, dear Lord;
And when our journey endeth here,
Receive us into glory there.

237. The Holy Sacraments.

Ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious. *1 Pet. 2, 3.*

God, knowing the hardness and fickleness of man's heart, knowing better than we ourselves how prone it is to doubt and how it resists the gracious working of the Holy Spirit, has established and confirmed His covenant of grace in manifold ways: by promise, by pledge, by oath, by seal, and in other ways. The Word of His revelation is full of promises assuring us that He will be our loving Father and that we shall be His beloved children. Moreover, God gives us the earnest of the Spirit as a pledge of the promised inheritance; for the joy of the Spirit which the believers experience is a foretaste of that joy which is in store for the people of God in heaven. To His promises and pledges God has added an oath. He says, Is. 54, 9. 10: "As I have sworn that the waters of Noah shall no more go over the earth, so have I sworn that I will not be wroth with thee nor rebuke thee. For the mountains shall depart and the hills be removed, but My kindness shall not depart from thee, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed, saith the Lord that hath mercy on thee." Now, when God adds an oath to something which He has promised His people, it is established.

As seals of His covenant, God has given the holy Sacraments. Of Abraham it is said: "He received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised." Now, if the Sacraments of the Old Testament were seals of the covenant of promise, much more so are those of the New Testament. And, indeed, they are more than seals, as the Lord's Supper is also called a "testament," conveying the bequest of the Testator. All these things are connected like links of a chain to make assurance doubly and trebly sure. In this way God labors to kindle, to nourish, and to strengthen faith in our hearts that we should be settled, immovable, and always abounding in joy and hope.

The first Christians always regarded the Sacraments as priceless. And though they shamefully have been corrupted and neglected by the false churches, our dear Lutheran Church has ever held them in highest esteem.

Prayer.

O Thou holy and merciful God, we humbly acknowledge and confess that by nature, in our natural-born sinful condition, we are all children of wrath; but we heartily thank Thee that of Thy mercy Thou hast given us in Christ Jesus the adoption of sons, washed us with the blood of Christ, sanctified us, and hast imparted to us, and confirmed, all Thy grace by Holy Baptism and hast continually strengthened our faith in Holy Communion. We pray Thee, keep us steadfast therein. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, with us abide
For round us falls the eventide;
Nor let Thy Word, that heavenly light,
For us be ever veiled in night.

In these last days of sore distress
Grant us, dear Lord, true steadfastness
That pure we keep, till life is spent,
Thy holy Word and Sacrament.

238. What Is Baptism?

Not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to His mercy He saved us by the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost. *Titus 3, 5.*

The Rationalists regarded Baptism as a mere ceremony and spoke of confirmation as being necessary to make it of any effect. And in our days there are many who believe that the children are not members of the Church until they have been confirmed. This is wrong. Holy Baptism is not a mere form, but a means of grace and complete in itself. Through it faith is created in the heart of the child, and thus such a child is a member of the household of God, the true Church. When a man is baptized, the Triune God enters into a covenant with him, pledging Himself to be His God and to adopt him as His son and heir. In the Gospel, God proclaims grace and peace in general to all, but when a man is baptized, God enters into a covenant with that man personally and individually, and in this covenant He promises to forgive the sins of that man, to impute Christ's righteousness to him, and to instate him as an heir of all the riches of Christ. This covenant is not made for God's sake; God stands in need of no covenant. It is for man's sake that every one who is baptized should have the full assurance that by his baptism God has entered into a covenant of grace with him. This is implied in the words: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Baptism saves, because in and through it God receives man into His covenant of grace. For this reason Ananias said to Saul: "Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins"; and St. Peter writes: "Baptism doth now also save us." Baptism saves, not as though water could wash away sins, but because it is the ordained means through which the Triune God establishes His covenant of grace with those who are baptized and believe. Believe the Gospel and be baptized and know that God has made a covenant with you and you with God.

Water is the visible element in Baptism. Is Baptism, then, simple water? No, the water is comprehended in God's command and connected with God's Word. Great things are connected with the water of Baptism.

Prayer.

Almighty God, who didst save faithful Noah and his family during the Flood, who safely leddest Thy people Israel through the Red Sea, prefiguring thereby the washing of Holy Baptism, and who by the baptism of Thy beloved Son didst sanctify and ordain Jordan and all waters for a saving flood and an abundant washing away of sin: we thank Thee that in Thy dear Son Thou didst make a new covenant with lost mankind and didst institute Baptism as an open fountain to wash away sin. Let everywhere children be born to Thee by water and the Spirit that Thy kingdom may be spread ever more and more throughout the world. Amen.

Blessed Jesus, here we stand,
Met to do as Thou hast spoken,
And this child, at Thy command,
Now we bring to Thee in token
That to Christ it here is given;
For of such shall be Thy heaven.

239. The Modes of Baptizing.

Arise and be baptized and wash away thy sins. *Acts 22, 16.*

The candidate for Baptism is to be baptized "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." In the name and by authority of this Triune God, Baptism is to be administered. And when Christ commands: *"Baptize them,"* that means that water is to be applied to the person to be baptized. But the question now is how the water is to be applied.

The Baptists lay great stress on the mode of baptism. They insist on immersion, that is, on putting the whole body under water, and they rebaptize those not immersed. It is certain, however, that immersion was not always practised in the apostolic age. But even if the early Christians had employed only immersion, their example alone would not prove that we must do so also, or we should have to do many other things they did. The only question is what the word "baptize" means. According to the Bible, "baptize" means any manner of applying water, be it by washing, pouring, sprinkling, or immersing, and the Baptists are wrong in maintaining that immersion is the only right way.

Luke 11, 38 we read that a Pharisee who had invited Him to a meal at his house marveled that Jesus had not first washed ("baptized" is the Greek word) Himself before dinner. Heb. 9, 10 divers washings (baptizings) are mentioned. Mark 7, 4 it is said of the Pharisees that, when they come from the market, they do not eat except they wash (baptize). "And many other things there be which they have received to hold, as the washing [literally, baptizing] of cups and pots, brazen vessels, and of *tables*." Who can believe that the Pharisees regularly immersed themselves and their tables! To baptize, therefore, means to wash. But washing may take place by immersion, by pouring, by sprinkling, or some other application of water. Since, then, Scripture nowhere says that immersion is the only right mode of Baptism, no man should assert the contrary. It was impossible to immerse the three thousand on the Day of Pentecost, and surely the keeper of the prison at Philippi was not immersed.

Prayer.

Lord God, keep us, we beseech Thee, from despising the simple visible element in this sacred act of baptism and let the eyes of our faith look upon Thy command and Thy promise, nay, upon Thyself, upon the blood of Christ and Thy Spirit, which, being connected with the water, accomplish what Thou hast promised. May we realize that it is Thou, the Triune God, who here dost administer Baptism, forgiving our sins for Christ's sake, implanting faith in us, and receiving us as Thy children. Grant that this Thine ordinance may never be set aside, and let us learn that the mode of application is a matter of Christian liberty. Amen.

Wash it, Jesus, in Thy blood,
From the sin-stain of its nature;
Let it rise from out this flood
Clothed in Thee, a new-born creature;
May it, washed as Thou hast bidden,
In Thine innocence be hidden!

240. Who Has the Right to Baptize?

Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God. *1 Cor. 4, 1.*

Baptism was made a permanent institution by our Lord; this Sacrament is to be administered to the end of days. The eleven disciples to whom Christ gave that Great Commission before His ascension all died, but the charge to make disciples is valid even to-day. Christ entrusted His Gospel and His Sacraments to the entire Christian Church, the communion of saints. These are the possessors of all heavenly treasures merited by the Savior. All believers are spiritual priests and have the right to baptize.

And yet not every Christian may administer Baptism at his own pleasure or discretion. Why? Because God is a God of order. He established the office of the ministry. He demands that every Christian congregation do all things decently and in order by choosing and calling special ministers, or pastors, who in their name are to administer this Sacrament; for St. Paul says: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." Ordinarily the "ministers of Christ," duly called and ordained, are to administer Baptism in the name of Christ and the Church.

But in cases of necessity, when a child is in danger of dying before a true minister of Christ can be had, any Christian has the right to baptize. In our hymn-books you will find a formula for that very purpose. This so-called emergency baptism, whether administered by a man, woman, or child, must not be repeated if the child lives. It should, however, be publicly acknowledged and confirmed in church. The minister, therefore, makes inquiry how such baptism was applied, and if it was rightly administered, he duly records it, so that the child in after-years may rest assured of his having been validly baptized.

The question need not disquiet us whether Holy Baptism has been administered by an unbelieving pastor; for as little as a pious minister *increases* the efficacy of Baptism, just so little does a godless minister *decrease* it.

Prayer.

O Lord God, we have been made members of Thy holy Christian Church and partakers of the abounding riches of Thy grace. We thank Thee, heavenly Father, that Thou hast received us as Thy children. We thank Thee, O Lord Jesus, that Thou hast shed Thy blood for us and thereby washed us from all our sins. We thank Thee, O Thou Holy Spirit, that Thou hast regenerated and renewed us through Holy Baptism, so that we are the children of God and fellow-heirs, together with Christ, of eternal life. May we ever praise Thee, O Thou holy Trinity, for Thy gracious gifts, keeping Thy covenant! Amen.

Therefore hasten we to Thee,
Take the pledge we bring, O take it!
Let us here Thy glory see
And in tender pity make it
Now Thy child and leave it never,
Thine on earth and Thine forever.

241. Who is to be Baptized?

Go ye, therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost.

Matt. 28, 19.

When our Lord instituted Holy Baptism, He said: "Go ye and teach all *nations,* baptizing them." Nations are made up of men, women, and children. These are to be baptized, and these only — all nations, that is, all human beings, young and old. It is a sacrilegious practise of the Roman Catholic Church to baptize bells. That human beings are to be baptized is generally conceded; for the command of the Lord, "Baptize all nations," is clear. The question, however, is, Should all men be baptized, without distinction? The answer must be, No. We must distinguish between children and adults. Those who can be instructed are to be baptized after they have previously been instructed in the principal doctrines of the Christian religion; but little children should be baptized when brought to Baptism by those who have authority over them. Little children are baptized and thus regenerated; adults we first instruct, and when they profess to believe in Jesus Christ as their Savior, we baptize them in accordance with the command of our Lord: "Teach all nations, baptizing them," and: "Preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved."

Hence our practise is founded on the command and promise of Christ. The charge is: "Teach all nations, baptize them." The text does not say: First baptize, then teach. Christ says both should be done, each at the proper time. Those people who, on that first Pentecost Day, heard Peter preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ were first taught by him, and after they had "gladly received the Word, they were baptized." Lydia, at Philippi, was first instructed and then baptized; the keeper of the prison at the same city likewise. So this has always been the practise of the Church with regard to adults. Thus the command of the Master was understood and carried out by His disciples. Baptism, thus administered, is truly a means of grace, a gracious water of life. To such adults, Baptism is a seal of their covenant relation with God and greatly strengthens their faith.

Prayer.

Merciful God and Father, we thank Thee that by the Sacrament of Holy Baptism Thou hast regenerated us, who were conceived and born in sin, and hast received us as Thy children and heirs of eternal salvation; and we beseech Thee, graciously continue the good work which Thou hast begun in us that in true faith and with a holy life we may serve Thee and finally obtain the promised eternal inheritance. Amen.

Come, ye sinners, one and all,
Come, ye all have invitation;
Come, obey His gracious call,
Come and take His free salvation!
Firmly in these words believe:
"Jesus sinners doth receive."

242. Infant Baptism.

Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. That which is born of the flesh is flesh. *John 3, 5. 6.*

There are those who utterly and passionately reject infant baptism. Why? They believe that a man can be saved without Baptism. Now, Christ says: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." Salvation is by faith and Baptism. It should be remembered that the Lord connects these two, faith and Baptism, and we must never say: "If only I am baptized, it will make no difference whether I believe or not"; nor must we say: "If I but believe, it will make no difference whether I am baptized or not." The Lord has plainly and unmistakably said: *Believe and be baptized, and thou shalt be saved.*

But the opponents of infant baptism say: Little children cannot believe. The question, then, is: Can little children believe? The Word of God clearly says: "Without faith it is impossible to please God." Or are little children an exception to this? Do they please God without faith? Do they enter the kingdom of heaven without faith? "That which is born of the flesh is flesh." Therefore "ye must be born again," says the Lord. Are little children brought from the flesh to the Spirit, from the kingdom of nature to the Kingdom of Grace and of Glory without the new birth, without faith? No; there is no exception to the plan of salvation here. Of the same little children of whom Christ said that theirs is the kingdom of God He says: *"Which believe in Me."* These are the clear words of Him who is the Truth. He says of these little ones: *"Which believe in Me."* Christ Himself has told us that they do believe. To doubt or disbelieve His word is sin. And why should it be considered impossible that little children can and do believe? A child can receive the gifts of nature, why not the gifts of grace? It can receive nourishment of the body, why not of the soul? Why can it not have faith? Faith is a *gift* of grace, a gracious operation of *God.* This, therefore, settles the question of infant baptism. But why doubt that infants should be baptized? Have we not the command of Christ: "Baptize *all nations*"*?*

Prayer.

Almighty God, faithful Father, we thank Thee that by this washing of regeneration Thou dost receive into the covenant of Thy grace all nations, without distinction of sex or age, all that desire it or are brought to Thee. Especially do we praise Thee that Thou hast promised Thy kingdom also to little children and, since without faith they cannot enter it, dost regenerate them by water and the Spirit, forgiving them their sins and creating a new spiritual life in them. Let Baptism be their comfort against the guilt of sin and let them grow up as Thy true children. Amen.

Yes, Thy warning voice is plain,
And we fain would keep it duly:
"He who is not born again,
Heart and life renewing truly,
Born of water and the Spirit,
Will My kingdom ne'er inherit."

243. Sponsors.

In the mouth of two or three witnesses every word [shall] be established. *Matt. 18, 16.*

The duty of sponsors, in the first place, is to testify that the children whose sponsors they have become have been properly baptized and to pray for them. From this follows that Christian parents should invite such people to be sponsors for their children as are able to pray acceptably to God. One who does not pray for himself will never pray for the baptized child whose sponsor he has been asked to be.

What is more, Lutheran parents should choose as sponsors only those who are of the same faith which they have and confess. The sponsors are to promise to be of help in instructing the children in the Six Chief Parts of Christian doctrine as embodied in the Small

Catechism of Dr. Martin Luther. Will a man promise this if he considers this doctrine false? Never! And though he did promise it with his mouth, he never will do so with his heart and in truth, and he will never keep that promise.

Be very careful, therefore, dear parents, what kind of people you choose as sponsors for your children! And you sponsors, do not regard the promise you are making at the baptism of a child as a light matter! Fulfil the promise you made there. You solemnly promised before God and in the presence of fellow-Christians that you would see that the child is instructed in the Word of God and taught to walk in the way of His commandments. You are to see to it, therefore, that the child whose godfather or godmother you are is properly instructed in the Lutheran Catechism. This is in accordance with the last command of our Lord Jesus to baptize and to *teach* the child. When you give such a child to God in the Sacrament of Holy Baptism and afterwards send it to the pastor to be instructed, you are obeying Christ. Thus Holy Baptism will become a source of comfort to it for all the days of its life, yea, it will consider the day of its baptism the happiest day of its God-given life. Do you often remind your sponsor child of the solemn covenant it has made with God in Baptism? Oh, how the minds of our baptized children would be impressed with heaven, how much more would they be induced to keep the faith if their parents and sponsors would tell them what Baptism means to them!

Prayer.

Almighty God, merciful Father, we give Thee hearty thanks that Thou dost graciously preserve and increase Thy Church and dost grant also unto our little children the new birth in Holy Baptism, making them members of Thy dear Son, Thy children, and heirs of Thy heavenly kingdom. We humbly beseech Thee that we, and all who are called and brought to Baptism, may by Thee be kept in this grace, that we may at all times walk worthy of Thee unto all pleasing, and finally, with all Thy saints, obtain the promised inheritance in heaven. Amen.

O grant me, Lord, to do,
With ready heart and willing,
Whate'er Thou shalt command,
My calling here fulfilling;

To do it when I ought
With all my strength; and bless
The work I thus have wrought,
For Thou must give success.

244. The Benefits of Baptism.

Ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus; for as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ. *Gal. 3, 26. 27.*

By Baptism we enter into union with Christ, we put on Christ, the benefits of Christ's redemption become our own, we thereby become the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus. The same thing is expressed by the command: "Baptize them *into* the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost." The phrase "*into* the name" has a deep significance. It does not merely mean: Baptize them by authority of the Triune God; "into" denotes entrance, it denotes entering into fellowship, close communion, with the Triune God. "Baptize *into* the name" makes the promise and gives the assurance that the person who, before he was baptized, was without God through Holy Baptism has entered into relationship with God, has become a child of God. Is that true? Christ says so when He commands: "Teach all nations, baptizing them," or, literally translated: "Make disciples of all nations, baptizing them." By Baptism we become disciples of Christ. How does this wonderful change come about? Baptism kindles faith in him who is baptized; it makes him a believer in Christ, a follower of Him, and thus a true disciple of His. Do you believe this?

There are, indeed, those to whom Baptism means nothing more than a solemn rite of initiation into outward communion with the Church or, at best, a mere sign or symbol suggestive of edifying thoughts, but conveying, giving, or bestowing nothing. Let them remember what Christ promises: "He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved." The word "saved" describes all the benefits of Baptism. To be saved means to be delivered from harm; it means nothing less than to be delivered from sin, death, and the devil, to be received into the kingdom of Christ, and to live with Him forever. Baptism *saves.* Our Catechism says: "It works forgiveness of sins, delivers from death and the devil, and gives eternal salvation to all who believe this, as the words and promises of God declare." Baptism, therefore, is not only a sign, or symbol, of forgiveness, but *it actually imparts forgiveness.*

Prayer.

O kind and merciful God, we heartily thank Thee that all Thy grace has been confirmed to us by Holy Baptism. As natural water takes away the uncleanness of the body, so this heavenly washing cleanses our souls from the stains of sin. Through this Sacrament we are regenerated, and faith has been kindled in us, by faith in Christ Jesus we are the children of God, and as children of God we are heirs of eternal salvation. Grant, O Lord God, that we may at all times duly remember our blessed baptism and let it be a comfort unto our souls in temptation, a powerful incentive to a godly life, and an encouragement to consecrate ourselves to Thee, so that we may ever be Thine own. Amen.

That by the water and the Word
We're born again we thank Thee, Lord.
In life and death Thine let us be
And Thine in all eternity.

245. The Power of Baptism.

But ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God.
1 Cor. 6, 11.

Art and science have made earthly life more enjoyable and comfortable; but no human art and invention can wash away sin. Money and wealth buy almost anything on earth; but all the money of the world is insufficient to settle our account with God. No human contrivance can quiet the voice of conscience and give a peaceful heart; no earthly remedy can heal the wounds of the soul and overcome death and every woe. In all these things human efforts have failed.

But there is a wonderful power which does achieve all these things. Baptism is such a gracious water of life. It heals the wounds of mankind, cleanses its stains, and removes its woe.

"How can water do such great things?" Common water can never take away the filth of the soul. "It is not the water indeed that does them, but *the word of God which is in and with the water.*" With the word of God it is "a gracious water of life and a washing of regeneration in the Holy Ghost, as St. Paul says, Titus, chapter third: 'By the washing of regeneration and renewing of the Holy Ghost, which He shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ, our Savior, that, being justified by His grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.'" In short, how is it that by the water of Baptism forgiveness and eternal life are obtained? Answer: "The word of God which is in and with the water conveys these great things into Baptism, . . . and faith appropriates them unto itself." For example, the water of the Jordan had no power in itself to cleanse from leprosy, but when Naaman, the leper, washed himself in the Jordan seven times, he was cleansed of his leprosy. Why? Because the Word of God imparted that power to the water. Again, without any weapons of war, and with only three hundred men, Gideon conquered the mighty host of the Midianites. Why? Because of the command of God. *All depends on the word, the command and promise, of God.* So the power of this Sacrament is not the water, but the word of God connected therewith. In this word the omnipotent and faithful Triune God is present.

Prayer.

Almighty God, faithful Father, we praise Thee that of Thy mercy Thou hast made Baptism a washing of regeneration and dost communicate to us therein treasures beyond human wisdom to devise or human power to give. Teach us to understand that it is not the water indeed that does the great things, but Thy word, which is in and with the water, and in which Thou Thyself art present with Thy divine grace and power, which is able to call forth life out of death, to kindle faith, by which we put on Christ. Let us ever thank Thee for Thy adorable grace. Amen.

The eye of sense alone is dim
And nothing sees but water;
Faith sees Christ Jesus and in Him
The Lamb ordained for slaughter;
It sees the cleansing fountain, red
With the dear blood of Jesus
Which from the sins inherited
From fallen Adam frees us
And from our own misdoings.

246. What Baptism Signifies.

We are buried with Christ by Baptism into death, that, like as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. *Rom. 6, 4.*

Christ died, died our death, the death that is the wages of our sin. But He was raised from the dead and lives. In this new life of His He no longer has any connection with our sins. He died unto sin once, in our stead, for us. He now lives unto God.

Now, in Baptism we put on Christ. We are buried with Him by Baptism into death. We are, as it were, crucified with Him. Through Baptism, Christ and His vicarious death are imputed to us so perfectly that God looks upon us as if we ourselves had died and been buried for our sins.

Now, God has not given such grace to let sin reign in our mortal bodies, but we should also know and believe that we are buried with Christ by Baptism into death for the purpose "that, like as He was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should *walk in newness of life.*" Thus, too, in Baptism, like Christ, we are made alive, alive unto God. We should not yield our members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin, but yield ourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead.

All this is signified by our entering into, and coming out of, the baptismal water. Baptism should signify to us, and always remind us of the fact, "that the old Adam in us should by daily contrition and repentance be drowned and die with all sins and evil lusts and, again, a new man daily come forth and arise, who shall live before God in righteousness and purity forever." Thus we Christians should daily rise from our sins, walk and grow before God in true faith and good works.

What an incentive we have, then, to lead a holy life because in Baptism we have been buried with Christ into death! This doctrine of Holy Baptism will not produce secure sinners, as some people think. Constant watchfulness is required, lest the Old Man, after all, regain the mastery over us. He may seem buried in us, but suddenly he rises, ready to assume control. We must daily return to Christ, the Source of all spiritual strength. Our Christian life must be a daily renewal of the baptismal grace.

Prayer.

Most merciful Father, we humbly beseech Thee to grant that, being dead unto sin and living unto righteousness and being buried with Christ in His death, we may crucify the Old Man and utterly abolish the whole body of sin; and that, as we are made partakers of the death of Thy Son, we may also be made partakers of His resurrection, so that finally, with all the members of Thy holy Church, we may inherit Thine everlasting kingdom; through Jesus Christ, Thy Son, our Lord, to whom we daily return for forgiveness and whom we implore for strength to sin no more. Amen.

Now one with God through Christ, our Lord,
Our life a song of praise shall be,
No jarring note, no broken chord,
Can mar or end the melody;
For, crucified with Christ, we rise
To life with Him that never dies.

247. Our Baptismal Vow.

Offer unto God thanksgiving and pay thy vows unto the Most High. *Ps. 50, 14.*

Some vows are wrong and must be broken. When monks or nuns vow to be blindly obedient to their superiors, to live in poverty, and to abstain from marriage, their vows are against the Word of God and are not made with a view of showing thankfulness, but of meriting heaven. Also the lodge vows are wrong and must be broken because they are frivolous and are made in uncertain things. But lawful vows should conscientiously be kept.

Now, there is one vow which we all have made and which we are obliged to pay to the Most High — our baptismal vow. In Baptism we have renounced the devil and all his works and all his pomp and promised to serve the Triune God, and Him only. In your infancy Christ received you into His Kingdom of Grace in Holy Baptism and made you His child that you should serve Him forever. But have you always remained with Christ? Countless numbers break their baptismal vow, sever their connection with Christ as they grow up, and deliver themselves to the devil and his works and his pomp, which in Baptism they had renounced. And what does Baptism benefit them if they throw away and cast aside those heavenly treasures which God had given them? What good does it do them? No good; on the contrary, if, having been made God's children in Baptism, they afterwards live like heathen, their sin is all the greater, as our Savior warned the man who was healed at Bethesda: "Behold, thou art made whole; sin no more lest a worse thing come upon thee." But, sad to say, many break their baptismal vow and fall away. Even among children, young, unconfirmed children, we sometimes find some who have forgotten their God and waste their lives, serving sin and not their Savior.

Have you forgotten God, or are you on the point of forgetting

Him? Without faith we cannot be God's children nor heirs of salvation. But all who return to Him will be received and not cast out.

Prayer.

Hereby, God Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I return to Thee and renew the covenant of Baptism, this day and for all times renouncing the devil, all his works, and all his pomp, also the ways of the wicked world and of my sinful flesh. To Thee, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, I consecrate anew my body and soul and commit to Thee the temporal, spiritual, and eternal welfare of both myself and my kin. Grant me grace, O Lord, always to draw new power and a strengthening of my faith from the means of grace, the Word and the Sacraments, and ever to be willing to serve Thee. Amen.

Jesus, Master, whom I serve,
Though so feebly and so ill,
Strengthen hand and heart and nerve
All Thy bidding to fulfil;
Open Thou mine eyes to see
All the work Thou hast for me.

248. Confirmation.

Thou hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.
1 Tim. 6, 12.

Confirmation is a solemn reassertion, on the part of the catechumens, of the covenant once established between them and God, in Holy Baptism, a covenant in which they renounced the devil and all his works and all his pomp and entered into a most intimate relation to God by faith in Christ Jesus. They repeat the vow made through their sponsors in Holy Baptism, thus dedicating themselves anew to the service of God. This is not a repetition of the Sacrament of Baptism, but an assertion of firm and faithful adherence to the baptismal covenant. That this renunciation of the devil and the profession of faith is spoken in concert by the catechumens and in the presence of the Christian congregation is also highly appropriate. For by Baptism they also entered into most intimate union with each other and with the whole Christian Church, the communion of saints.

Confirmation is, secondly, a public and solemn avowal of adherence to the true visible Church, the Church of the pure doctrine and unadulterated Sacraments. Adherence to this Church is, in fact, the duty of every Christian. Our catechumens, in their confirmation vow, declare their willingness to be and remain members of the Evangelical Lutheran Church all the days of their lives, and thereupon the pastor, in the name of the congregation, publicly acknowledges their membership. The prayers of the entire congregation then ascend to the Throne of Grace in their behalf.

A third significance of confirmation is that of a public exhibition of the fitness of the catechumens to be admitted to the Lord's Supper. Confirmation is not a sacrament, but the Lord's Supper is. To receive it worthily, our children must be able to examine themselves, and in order to be able to examine themselves, they must know what sin and grace means; in other words, they must have some knowledge of the doctrines of the Bible; hence the necessity of catechumenal instruction.

Prayer.

O God, my Father, I entrust myself fully to Thy care, to Thy grace and love, and to Thy truthful promises. O Jesus, my Redeemer, I clothe myself with Thy merits, with Thy blood and wounds, and with Thy blessed communion. O Holy Spirit, my Comforter, I consign myself wholly to Thy guidance, power, light, and comfort. O Triune God, Thou art mine, I am Thine; Thou art my Father, I am Thy child; Thou art my Shepherd, I am Thy sheep; Thou art my Lord, I am Thine own. And when the hour of my death is at hand, take me unto Thyself, O Lord, for I am Thine, and Thou art mine; my soul yearneth to be with Thee. Sustain me and all true Christians in this resolution. Amen.

Thine forever! God of love
Hear us from Thy throne above.
Thine forever may we be
Here and in eternity.

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249. Be Steadfast in Serving the Triune God, and Him Only.

Be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life. *Rev. 2, 10.*

God desires man to serve Him. For that purpose He created him, and to that end He sent His only-begotten Son to redeem him after he had fallen into sin.

There is but one true service, the *service of the Triune God,* the only true God, who has revealed Himself in the three Persons of the holy Trinity. Any other so-called service of God is an abomination to Him. He says: "I am the Lord, that is my name, and My glory will I not give to another, neither My praise to graven images"; and again: "Thou shalt worship the Lord, thy God, *and Him only* shalt thou serve."

Furthermore, let your service be a willing service and not for the sake of performing an irksome duty which you must perform if you wish to escape the terrors of hell and earn heaven. Every service not begotten of faith in Jesus and not based upon gratitude to God for His tender mercies is a vain service and ill-pleasing to our heavenly Father. Always bear in mind what Christ has done for you, and that heaven is offered you as a free and unmerited gift of grace; bear in mind that in your infancy God received you into His kingdom in Holy Baptism, made you His child and an heir of salvation; and also bear in mind that on the day of your confirmation you promised before many witnesses to serve Him forever. Then your service will be a willing and glad and therefore a genuine service and will remain so even amidst trials and difficulties; then your service will be a *steadfast* service. There are many children who soon after their confirmation forgot their oath and to-day, despite all warnings, are walking the way of sin. The first symptom of their fall was a certain indifference and a lack of zeal for heavenly things, which took possession of their souls. They were not interested in God's kingdom as much as they formerly had been. They no more read the Scriptures, and they cease to pray. They commit gross sins and do not repent of them. Are *you* going this downward course? Blessed is he who serves God in true faith all the days of his life!

Prayer.

O my God, how can I sufficiently thank Thee that Thou hast deigned to raise me, a wretched sinner, to the blessed relation of a Christian by means of Holy Baptism, that gracious washing of regeneration? Oh, keep and preserve me in this state of grace unto death! Let me not waver amid all the trials and temptations that beset me. Let me not follow those who shun the company of Christians and seek their most intimate friends among the children of this world. I entrust myself fully to Thy care, grace, and love. Amen.

Let me be Thine forever,
Thou faithful God and Lord;
Let me forsake Thee never
Nor wander from Thy Word.
Lord, do not let me waver,
But give me steadfastness,
And for such grace forever
Thy holy name I'll bless.

250. Remember that God Is Omniscient.

Can any hide himself in secret places that I shall not see him? saith the Lord. *Jer. 23, 24.*

God knows all things. He knows all events of the past, the present, and the future. All our thoughts and plans lie uncovered before Him. Thus we read in Ps. 139: "Lord, Thou hast searched me and known me. Thou knowest my downsitting and mine uprising; Thou understandest my thought afar off. Thou compassest my path and my lying down and art acquainted with all my ways. For there is not a word in my tongue, but, lo, O Lord, Thou knowest it altogether. . . . Thine eyes did see my substance, yet being unperfect; and in Thy book all my members were written, which in continuance were fashioned, when as yet there was none of them."

God knows all things without making inquiry. All things are naked to Him. His eyes are in every place. He knows all our thoughts. He knows our every transgression. We therefore keep aloof from sin, because we know that everything is known unto God; everything is opened unto His eyes. We know that He is a Judge of our thoughts and of the secrets of our hearts. We therefore pray with David: "Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults."

However, this truth, that God is omniscient, also affords us sweet comfort. God knows our every need. We may confidently trust in Him, the Omniscient, whose "eye is upon them that fear Him, upon them that hope in His mercy." God's infinite omniscience is all the more comforting because it is an infinite wisdom. "O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" By wisdom He formed all the works of creation, in wisdom He planned our salvation, in wisdom He guides us throughout our life to a blessed eternity. He says: "I will guide thee with Mine eye." Ps. 32, 8. Therefore answer with David, Ps. 25: "Unto Thee, O Lord, do I lift up my soul. O my God, I trust in Thee; let me not be ashamed."

Prayer.

O Thou omniscient Lord and God, in Thee I live, move, and have my being in life and death. I will praise Thee, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; wise and marvelous are Thy works, and that my soul knoweth right well. Thou wast my Stay when I was in my mother's womb; my substance was not hid from Thee when I was made and curiously wrought. Thou hast nourished and kept me; Thou hast protected my life in manifold ways and guided me by Thy omniscience, for which I sincerely thank and praise Thee. Amen.

Thy grace that ever floweth,
O Father, what is good
Or evil ever knoweth
To mortal flesh and blood.
What to Thine eye all-seeing
And to Thy counsel wise
Seems good doth into being,
O mighty Prince, arise!

251. The Chief Cause of Backsliding.

Let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.
1 Cor. 10, 12.

Many who were confirmed at the Lord's altar have forsaken it and now worship the idols of this present world. The chief cause of this backsliding on the part of those who thus broke their confirmation vow is this: They are not much concerned about their immortal souls. They look upon confirmation as some kind of festivity, the only thing about it worrying them being the examination. That over, they have no further cares. Others regard the day of confirmation with greater seriousness. Their hearts burn with love for Christ Crucified. They hate sin and worldliness. They deprecate the thought that they should ever turn recreants. They think themselves equal to any temptation; and why? They rely upon their own strength and reason. They trust in themselves.

Beware of relying upon your own prudence and power in a spirit of conceited self-confidence! Whoever trusts in himself is half lost already. Powerful and treacherous temptations are round about you, and your sinful flesh is a tempter within you. The Spirit, indeed, is willing, but the flesh is weak. You are now believers; but be not deceived. Where grace has become powerful, the wickedness of the heart is sure to assert itself more powerfully than ever. Where one devil is driven out, seven will try to reenter. You will not walk a step without danger of falling. You will not live a minute in which Satan is not lying in wait for you. He will spy out your weakness and cater to your sinful taste. What is evil he will know how to render pleasant; what is good, unpleasant. Forbidden things he will make easy; your duty, hard. The broad way he will make smooth for you; the narrow way, thorny. He was able to persuade our parents when they were still in the state of innocence to disobey God, to turn David into an adulterer and murderer, a disciple of Christ into a traitor. Left to your own strength, you are not only half lost, but wholly. Do not, therefore, trust in yourselves. *Self-confidence is the chief cause of backsliding.* "Watch and pray that ye enter not into temptation." The spiritual sleeper is in great danger. Keep the Sword of the Spirit shiny, ready for instant use.

Prayer.

Almighty God, merciful Father, Thou dost call me and all sinners to repentance in the words: "Return, thou backsliding Israel, and I will not cause Mine anger to fall upon you; for I am merciful, and I will not keep anger forever. Only acknowledge thine iniquity, that thou hast transgressed against the Lord, thy God." This voice of repentance and grace daily reaches my ear and my heart. Grant, O Lord, that I may not rest secure. Let me not be like a man sleeping at the edge of a precipice, not knowing that his next move will shatter him; nor like a sentinel, who lays down his arms and sits down to rest and sleep, while the enemies are approaching. Let my heart watch and pray without ceasing. Amen.

I lift my heart to Thee, Savior divine,
For Thou art all to me, and I am Thine.
By Thine own cords of love, so sweetly wound
Around me, I to Thee am closely bound.

252. The Office of the Keys.

Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them; and whosesoever sins ye retain, they are retained. *John 20, 23.*

The keys are a symbol of power. A key is used to open or close a door. We must think of heaven as a large house with a door. The Office of the Keys is the right and power to open and close that door in the house of the heavenly Father, or, in plain language, the right and power to forgive and retain sins. Why, then, is this power called the Office of the Keys? Because by the remission of sins heaven is opened, and by the retention of sins heaven is closed. Christ says, Matt. 18, 18: "Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven; and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven."

The only means which the Church possesses for the regeneration of the world is the Word of God. Being the power of the Word of God, the Office of the Keys comprises the power to preach the Gospel and to administer the Sacraments, especially the power to remit and to retain sins. The Church has no other power, no temporal power, no power of the sword, no worldly means of enforcing any law or statute. It has no right to compel men by force to cease from sin. Its aim must not be to work for outward reforms and social improvement. The only power the Church has is the power of the Spirit of God, a spiritual power; its aims are spiritual — the conversion of the heart. Its means are spiritual — the power of the Word: the Law of God, which threatens the impenitent sinner, and the Gospel, which forgives the penitent. Where that does not avail, the Church can do no more for man.

This doctrine of the Office of the Keys is one of special interest and importance because there are so many who have a very wrong idea of the mission and power of the Church. Considering particularly the false claims of Antichrist, this matter can hardly be touched upon too often. The mission and power of the Church is to proclaim the saving Gospel of Christ, namely, to forgive the sins of the penitent sinner and to retain the sins of the impenitent according to the command of Christ.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, our only Savior and Redeemer, we give Thee most hearty thanks that Thou didst not only by Thy perfect obedience and innocent suffering and death obtain for us the remission of sins, but didst also, with the Office of the Keys, entrust this treasure to the Christian Church, instituting the holy ministry, by which Thy gifts should be administered and applied to us in order that no penitent sinner ever might be without comfort. As it is not in our power, however, to repent, we beseech Thee to give to all first the knowledge of sin and thereupon true faith, which lays hold of Thee and Thy grace. Hear us for the sake of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen.

Abide, O dear Redeemer,
Among us with Thy Word
And thus now and hereafter
True peace and joy afford.

253. The Office of the Keys Is the Only Office in the Church.

They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them. *Luke 16, 29.*

The Church has only the power of the Word. It can command nothing that is not commanded in the Word of God; it must employ no force to make its word effective. It can only exhort, warn, and beseech; it can only point to God's grace or displeasure. A congregation or a church-body can go no farther than declaring whom it will, and whom it will not, acknowledge as a brother. If one will not hear the words which are proclaimed in Christ's name, a congregation may, and should, excommunicate him, consider him a heathen and a publican, debar him from receiving the Lord's Supper, and discontinue Christian fellowship with him. More than this, however, a church-body or a congregation cannot do.

It is true, this method looks rather old-fashioned, but nevertheless it is a fact that Christ has given us but one means whereby to bring sinners to Him, namely, His Word and the Sacraments. He commands: "Go, preach the Gospel," — nothing more and nothing less. For this reason these are the only legitimate means in the Church; they are the only net which Christ has given His ministers to catch men for His kingdom. Nothing is more clearly and plainly contrary and opposed to the very nature of Christianity than a desire to expand Christ's kingdom by physical force. The very first time that Christ sent out His disciples, He said to them: "And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand," and thus gave them the power they should wield in the Church — the power of the Word.

When Christ went up to Jerusalem to die, Salome, the mother of the apostles James and John, the sons of Zebedee, approached Him and begged that in His kingdom He might permit one of her two sons to sit at His right and the other at His left hand, so that they rank next to Him. But the Lord did not grant this petition. His Church is to wield no temporal, but only a spiritual power. The Office of the Keys, which is the power of the Word, is the only office in the Church.

Prayer.

O Lord God, Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, preserve unto us Thy precious Word, which is our heart's joy and comfort. Enlighten our teachers and ministers and grant Thine increase to their labors. Strengthen our pastors and prosper them that they may be well-pleasing to Thee. Bless them and let the work of their hands prosper. Fill our souls with true fear of Thee and fill our hearts with joy in the Holy Ghost. Enable us, we beseech Thee, by the illumination of Thy Holy Spirit, to use the Office of the Keys according to Thy will and with Christian prudence. Amen.

Grant that, as long as we are living,
We bless and praise Thy name, O Lord,
Receive Thy mercies with thanksgiving,
Forever trusting in Thy Word.
All glory be to Thee alone
On earth and then before Thy throne.

254. To Whom the Office of the Keys is Given.

Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven, and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. For where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them.

Matt. 18, 18. 20.

We are not to believe that the above commission was given only to the twelve disciples or to them and their successors. There is no hint here or anywhere in the New Testament of any such successor, and the very nature and structure of the commission forbids any such interpretation. Whomsoever Christ sends out to do the work which He came to do in the world, on Him Christ breathes, saying: "Receive the Holy Ghost," and to him He gives the power to remit and to retain sins.

This power is given to the whole Church of Christ, to each member, not to some special one alone. Christ gave it to every local congregation in which true believers are present; for it was such a local church of which He said: "Tell it unto the church." Nor did He give this power to the Church only in the Apostolic Age. He would have all men come to the knowledge of the truth by the Word of Reconciliation, which is to be proclaimed to them. He said: "Go ye and teach all nations." The apostles, accordingly, preached the Word, and after their death their pupils, then constituting the Church, took up the message and handed it on to succeeding generations of the Church; and so the Word has come down the ages to us of the present day. The Office of the Keys is the particular church power which Christ has given to His Church on earth, to all its members, large and small, men, women, and children. All Christians are priests and kings, 1 Pet. 2, 9: "Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light." As such they have the authority and power to loose and to bind.

And they must use this power. They must preach the Law, they must declare the Gospel. It is their duty to administer the Sacraments. They must close and open the gates of heaven. Publicly, however, not all Christians are called to bind or loose.

Prayer.

Merciful God and Father, we thank Thee that Thou hast bestowed upon Thy Church the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and we beseech Thee, grant us grace to comfort our souls with the remission of sins proclaimed by Thy servants, by sincere amendment of life continually to thank Thee for this unspeakably great gift and so to use it that we may ever remain in communion with Thee on earth and finally, with all the redeemed, glorify Thy name in the Kingdom of Glory. Amen.

Rejoice, then, ye sad-hearted,
Who sit in deepest gloom,
Who mourn o'er joys departed,
And tremble at your doom.
Despair not, He is near you,
Yea, standing at the door,
Who best can help and cheer you
And bids you weep no more.

255. How the Office of the Keys is Exercised.

No man taketh this honor unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron. *Heb. 5, 4.*

The Christians, to whom Christ has given the Office of the Keys, or the power of the Word, should *make use* of this power. They should preach the Word of Christ to one another, the children should be baptized and taught, the Lord's Supper is to be administered.

No individual Christian in the Church, however, is the sole possessor of all the treasures comprised in the Office of the Keys; all Christians have an equal right to them. Hence no one must publicly exercise what belongs to all without the common consent of all; otherwise great confusion would result. Every Christian may *in private* comfort his brother with the Gospel of Christ or reprove him with the Law of God, administer emergency baptism, and the like; but the *public* functions of the office each Christian congregation should give to certain men qualified for the work by calling them expressly for this purpose. And what these called ministers of Christ do in their office they do in the name and in the stead of the congregation. Without such call no one should exercise these public functions. Rom. 10, 15 we read: "How shall they preach except they be *sent?*" And Heb. 5, 4: "No man taketh this honor unto himself but he that is *called* of God."

The apostles were called *directly* by Christ; but afterwards all pastors were elected by the congregation. So we read that the congregation at Jerusalem cast lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles. According to Acts 14, 23 the congregations in the apostolic days chose their ministers by raising their hands, thus designating their choice. And these men, who were called *indirectly,* by the congregation,—not directly, like the apostles of Christ,—also had a *divine call.* Therefore Paul said to the pastors of the church at Ephesus, who had been called by the congregation: "Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock, over the which the *Holy Ghost* hath made you overseers." And again, 1 Cor. 4, 1: "Let a man so account of us as of the ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God."

Prayer.

Lord Jesus, with Thy visible presence removed, Thou wast henceforth to dwell among us in Thy Word and in the Sacraments instituted by Thee. Making these the place of Thy permanent abode and imparting through them all the fruits of Thy redemption, Thou hast committed them to Thy Church, yea, to every local congregation, as an everlasting inheritance, as the power of God for its own and the world's salvation. We heartily thank Thee that Thou hast instituted the ministerial office for our temporal and eternal welfare. Amen.

Sin's debt, that fearful burden,
Let not your souls distress;
Your guilt the Lord will pardon
And cover with His grace.
He comes, He comes, procuring
The peace of sin forgiven,
To all God's sons securing
Their part and lot in heaven.

256. Brotherly Admonition.

Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye, which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself lest thou also be tempted. *Gal. 6, 1.*

If a Christian sees a brother sin, a fellow-Christian belonging to the same church, or if he does some wrong to him, what shall he do? Hate him? No; Lev. 19, 17 God says: "Thou shalt not hate thy brother in thine heart; thou shalt in any wise rebuke thy neighbor and not suffer sin upon him." Instead of hating him, he should show him brotherly love by telling him his fault, for the purpose of gaining him, that is, of bringing him to repentance with love and patience, in a friendly, brotherly way, and induce him to amend his ways. Is it not your sacred duty, if you are a Christian, to restore such a one? If you see great bodily danger threatening him, you warn him. Why? Because he may lose his life. If you see him sinning, you know that he is in danger of losing life eternal, — and you do not care to warn him? Is that acting toward him in a brotherly manner? Is not eternal life worth infinitely more than temporal life?

Matt. 18 the Lord says: "If thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him *alone;* if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother." The Lord says: "Go and tell him his fault." Convince him of his sin, so that, by the grace of God, he will repent of it. Do it in a spirit of love with a view to gaining him.

But if he does not hear you? The Lord says: "If he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more that in the mouth of two or three *witnesses* every word may be established." If you do not succeed in gaining the erring brother, you are to take one or two brethren as witnesses, and jointly with these you are to admonish him again. Wisdom and love dictates the selection of friends of the erring brother for this purpose. And these friends are not only to be reliable witnesses of what is said and done, but they, too, should add their earnest exhortations and entreaties. If, nevertheless, he persists in his sin and neither hears the witnesses, what is to be done then? The Lord says: "If he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the *church.*" The whole local congregation shall admonish and warn him.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus, dearest Savior, when Satan attacks us, stand by us; when the world persecutes us, take us into Thy protecting arms; when flesh and blood overpower us, strengthen us in spirit; when we err, bring us back to Thy fold; when we fall, raise us by Thy hand; when we become weak and weary in the performance of our duties, refresh us; when our Christian brethren admonish and warn us, grant us grace to listen to them, and open Thou our eyes, so that we may see the error of our ways; when the whole local congregation exhorts and entreats us, let us not neglect to hear this voice lest it be said of us: "If he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican." Comfort us with Thy grace, and may Thy joyful Spirit uphold us. Amen.

To find a goodly human soul is gain;
To keep it does great pains and labor cost;
Most difficult the task — it oft seems vain —
To save the soul that was already lost.

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257. How is an Excommunicated Person to be Dealt with when He Is Penitent?

Forgive him and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. *2 Cor. 2, 7. 8.*

The severity of the punishment, the excommunication of an unrepentant sinner from a Christian congregation, should convince the offender of the gravity of his offense and remind him of the great final excommunication: "Depart from Me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire," that he may repent and return. And as Christ received publicans and sinners, the malefactor, and the woman taken in adultery; as Paul urges the church at Corinth to forgive the man who had committed a heinous sin, but who now repented of it; and as there is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth, — so the Church, too, should gladly forgive one who was excommunicated, but is penitently returning to the fold and restore the former privileges to him. If he confesses his sin to the congregation and promises to amend, the congregation is to receive him as a brother, and the called minister should make public announcement thereof. For excommunication is not intended for the perdition, but for the salvation, of the soul. Excommunication is to lead the impenitent sinner to repentance. He must now constantly think: "What if I should die suddenly? What if the congregation was right when it said: Your sins are bound before God? Will God not say: You have denied Me before men, and now I will also deny thee? The entire congregation would not condemn me if I were a Christian." And, praise be to God! this object is often attained. Frequently such discipline brings the sinning brother to repentance. And when he does repent, the Christian congregation should not be slow to forgive.

The congregation at Corinth had been slow to excommunicate an impenitent fornicator, until it was reprimanded by Paul. And it was slow to forgive when the sinner showed signs of repentance. We should forgive readily. We must not demand a certain period of probation. We should confirm our love to the repentant brother, forgiving and forgetting his sin and impenitence. The world acts differently in such cases. But Christians know: There is joy in heaven over one sinner that repenteth; and we believe that when the called ministers of Christ deal with us by His divine command, this is valid and certain also in heaven.

Prayer.

O Jesus, my precious Savior, be merciful unto me, a sinner, and by virtue of Thy merits remove like a cloud all my transgressions; cast them into the sea of Thine innocent blood that they may never again come to light or before the judgment of God. Keep me from all evil. Curb the wrath and fury of Satan and send Thy heavenly hosts to protect and guard me in all my ways.

Preserve me from error in doctrine and life; and if I do go astray, lead me back to Thy fold and ever be my Good Shepherd. I take refuge with Thee and wait upon Thy goodness. Amen.

Jesus, Thou me keep
'Mongst Thy faithful sheep,
Who upon Thy promise live
Bliss eternally to give;
Then my path will be
Through death's night to Thee.

258. To-day, if Ye Will Hear His Voice, Harden Not Your Hearts.

Repent ye therefore and be converted that your sins may be blotted out. *Acts 3, 19.*

O you who know that you are not yet temples of the Holy Ghost, resist not when He speaks to you with power. Grieve Him not by shutting the door against Him; for if you do, He will perhaps never again knock at your heart with such power and grace. Do not slam the door in the face of a friend, or he will perhaps never again approach your steps. "To-day if ye will hear His voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness," lest God say of you as He did of them: "Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and I sware in My wrath, They shall not enter into My rest." When you hear His voice, postpone not to open the door; for that is a dangerous thing.

And O ye Christians who already are temples of the Holy Ghost: "Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed." We who have received the Holy Ghost, we who have experienced His testimony in our hearts, we are exhorted not to grieve Him. By what is He grieved? All sins in thought, word, and deed grieve the Holy Ghost. He is grieved by every unholy act, word, and even desire, as it is written: "The Spirit lusteth against the flesh." And to the Corinthians, Paul writes: "If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are." Now, is it right to defile the temple of God by sin? Should you thus grieve the Holy Ghost?

Remember, He has done great things for you. You know that in your Savior you have forgiveness of sins and are made meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light. Who has kindled this light in you? It was God, your gracious and merciful God. And would you grieve Him who has done so much for you? What is your attitude towards God? Remember the fate that awaits every one who forsakes his God, breaks his baptismal vow, and serves the world and the flesh and Satan! Turn back before it is too late!

Prayer.

O merciful God, I prostrate myself before Thee in penitence, and with a contrite heart I confess unto Thee all my sins — those I was conceived and born in and those with which I offended Thee, not only during the past year, but all the days of my life. O Lord God, let my sins be blotted out by the blood of Jesus and let me partake anew of Thy grace. Let me not postpone my repentance, but seek Thy grace now, this very day and hour. Amen.

Think not, 'tis time enough, nor say,
God, who is gracious beyond measure,
Shuts not the door of grace to-day;
I'll first enjoy some carnal pleasure.
No, God forbid! If you are wise,
Grace offered now do not despise;
Who slights to-day the invitation
May ever miss of his salvation.
Come now to Jesus, come and live;
To-day He sinners doth receive.

259. Excommunication is Not Intended for the Perdition, but for the Salvation of the Soul.

As I live, saith the Lord God, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live.
Ezek. 33, 11.

God, according to His infinite love, wants all men to be saved; as Paul writes to Timothy: "God will have all men to be saved and to come unto the knowledge of the truth." He has given His Word, the Law and the Gospel, with the intention that through the Law sinners should come to a knowledge of their sins, and by means of the Gospel come to faith in Jesus Christ and be saved. All His precepts, institutions, and established orders in Holy Scripture have no other purpose than to lead sinners to the knowledge of their sins and to faith in Christ and therefore to eternal salvation.

Also excommunication, that is, the retention of sins and the exclusion of manifest and impenitent sinners from the Christian congregation, is not intended by God for the perdition, but for the salvation of the soul. When a congregation, in His name, declares an impenitent sinner a heathen man and a publican and this judgment is publicly announced by the minister of Christ, the object is no other than to show the sinner how grievously he has transgressed God's commandments in order that he may repent, believe, and be saved. That excommunication is intended for the salvation of the soul we see from the words of Christ Matt. 18, 15: "If he shall hear thee, thou hast *gained* thy brother." The object of church discipline is to *gain* the sinner.

We are therefore not to hurry from one grade of admonition to the other; but the three grades of brotherly admonition are to be repeated as long as there is hope that the erring brother may thereby be gained or until it becomes manifest that he obstinately refuses to heed the Word of God. There is only one reason for brotherly admonition and excommunication, and that is love of the sinner's immortal soul. 1 Cor. 5, 5 we read: "That the spirit may be *saved* in the Day of the Lord Jesus." When we excommunicate an impenitent sinner, it is done because we love him, because we wish to save his immortal soul. The act of excommunication seems a harsh measure, but it is done to lead men to repentance. The object is to gain, to save, the sinner.

Prayer.

Almighty and gracious God, who art our Stay and Staff in life and in the shadow of death, we pray Thee to visit us with Thy mercy and graciously to forgive us all our sins. Accept the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, as payment for our transgressions, since we were baptized in Christ's name and cleansed by His blood. Therefore deliver us, we pray Thee, from all attacks of the Evil One, that we may fight a good fight and overcome through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

Jesus, the name that charms our fears,
That bids our sorrows cease,
'Tis music in the sinner's ears,
'Tis life and health and peace.

He breaks the power of canceled sin,
He sets the prisoner free;
His blood can make the foulest clean,
His blood avails for me.

260. What Is a Christian Congregation?

Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst of them. *Matt. 18, 20.*

The Church, properly so called, is the congregation of saints, that is, all Christendom, the whole number of all believers. The Church is one and invisible. And yet the Bible speaks of a church at Rome, at Corinth, and at Ephesus. So, too, we have our local churches. Christians living in one locality organize for the purpose of work and worship. Such churches are visible. However, not all congregations have, teach, and confess the entire doctrine of the Word of God in all its purity; not all administer the holy Sacraments duly according to Christ's institution.

A truly Lutheran congregation accepts the whole Bible and nothing but the Bible; it observes all things whatsoever Christ has commanded; it expresses in its outward organization the character of the invisible Church; it acknowledges no authority but that of Christ; it avoids all commandments and dreams of men; it preaches the Gospel and administers the Sacraments according to divine institution; it is the mouthpiece of Christ to His own flock and to the world at large; it excludes manifest and impenitent sinners and keeps itself unspotted from the world. God Himself, the glorious and blessed God, dwells in the midst of such a congregation, and be it ever so small, and though there were but two or three true Christians gathered together in Christ's name. He dwells in the midst of them through the preaching of His Word and the administration of His Sacraments. Where the latter is lacking, the largest congregation, the grandest cathedral, the most magnificent temple is a murderer's den and an institution of Satan. But in a congregation which has the pure Word and the Christ-appointed Sacraments the Lord has set up His throne of grace. There He deigns to come down to spread a table with the Bread of Life for the soul.

Prayer.

O Lord God, who on the Day of Pentecost didst visit and endow the hearts of Thy faithful so graciously and richly, pour this same Spirit of Thine, we beseech Thee, like a fruitful rain upon our dry and famished hearts. Come, O Holy Spirit, and bless us with Thy manifold gifts that we may truly know and extol the great deeds of God done through Christ Jesus, that also we may speak in the congregation and praise Thee with new tongues. Grant us Thy gifts and blessings. Amen.

My Shepherd, now receive me!
My Guardian, own me Thine!
Great blessings Thou didst give me,
O Source of gifts divine!
Thy lips have often fed me
With milk and sweetest food;
Thy Spirit oft has led me
To stores of heavenly good.

261. Do Not Refuse to Serve the Lord.

As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another as good stewards of the manifold grace of God. *1 Pet. 4, 10.*

Some church people, like a wheelbarrow, go only when they are pushed. What unwillingness is frequently manifested by the members of congregations to serve on committees, to represent the congregation at synodical conventions, or to accept the honorable office of eldership! Alas, that there should be so many church-members who shirk their duty!

There are diversities of gifts in the Christian Church. The Lord gave them, and He has need of them in His kingdom. If a congregation has a hundred members, but drones, do-nothings, how can it thrive? Certainly, if three earnest workers agree to work for the church, they will accomplish more than a hundred drones. The householder went out to hire laborers into his vineyard. Those called to the kingdom of Christ are also called to labor in it.

Be not an idler in the vineyard, but lend your hand in order that the kingdom of God may thrive and grow and be spread abroad. You may be unaccustomed to do work in a congregation and are timidly asking, Where shall I step in? Step in anywhere. If you are willing to work, you can be of some use. During one of the great battles of the Civil War a recruit who had lost his company in the tumult of strife approached General Sheridan and timidly asked where he should step in. "Step in?" thundered Sheridan. "Step in anywhere; there's fighting all along the line!" In a Christian congregation there are many things to be done that the body of Christ may be edified, and different offices are created, which are linked together with the ministerial office. If you hold any office in the church, if any function rests upon you which you are expected to fulfil for the benefit of the church, attend to your duty with fidelity, "do it as of the ability which God gives." You, too, have some gift with which God has endowed you, and you are responsible to your divine Master; you are required to minister to others with your gift.

Prayer.

O Lord, Thou hast favored body and soul abundantly with every manner of blessing. How am I to find words adequate for Thy praise? How can I properly show my gratitude? Behold, O Lord, I offer unto Thee the sacrifice of my poor service and glorify Thy grace and mercy with all my strength and powers. In the congregation will I bless Thee. My soul shall honor Thee, my spirit must praise Thee, my mouth shall thank Thee, and all that is within me shall proclaim Thy glory. Amen.

Thou holy Fire, sweet Source of rest,
Grant that, with joy and hope possessed,
We always in Thy service stay
And trouble drive us not away.
Lord, by Thy power prepare each heart,
To our weak nature strength impart,
That firmly here we be contending,
Through life and death to Thee ascending.
Hallelujah! Hallelujah!

262. Why Should All Christians Join a Truly Christian Congregation?

And the Lord added to the Church daily such as should be saved. *Acts 2, 47.*

In the Bible our attention is often called to the fact that all the people, the entire congregation, serve the Lord. And this is the express will of God. Christians should not separate themselves from their fellow-believers, but unite with them for joint worship and work.

The visible Church is that organization in which the Gospel is preached and the Sacraments are administered, and in which continually children of God are born as dew in the morning. It is sad to think, therefore, that the number of those who are not church-members is so large. A large proportion of the inhabitants of our country are non-church-members. They cannot be induced to join a Christian congregation. I will not join the church, says one; for if I do, I shall have to pay for the support of the ministry and for missions. Another says: If I join the church, I shall have to be regular in my attendance, and I don't want to bind myself. Still another says: If I join the church, I shall have to be too careful, or they will continually admonish me. I prefer to be my own master. Sometimes people refuse to join a church because there is strife and discord among the members, and they do not want to have anything to do with such a church.

These are the reasons most commonly given why some people refuse to join a Christian congregation. A congregation is in duty bound to plead with such and to endeavor to persuade them to labor in the vineyard. Surely a congregation asks no unfair thing when it invites those to whom it furnishes the Bread of Life, who bring their children to its altars, where they themselves, too, receive the Lord's Supper, to become active members and help it bear its burdens. To frequent a church and to refuse to join it is clearly inconsistent, selfish, and ungrateful. And it is a most dangerous practise, for it tends to ruin a congregation, and it is, to say the least, a sin of omission on the part of such people.

Prayer.

I pray Thee, dearest Savior, do Thou sanctify me by the Holy Ghost and the blood Thou hast shed for me that I may henceforth earnestly guard against all manner of sins, keep my body and soul unspotted, and serve Thee in holiness and righteousness all the days of my life. Let me not shirk my duties or leave the administration of the affairs of my church to a few. Let me always bless and thank Thee in the congregation, presenting myself to Thee as a living sacrifice. Amen.

That as true Christians we may live
Or die in peace that Thou canst give,
To rise again when Thou shalt come
And enter our eternal home.

There shall we thank Thee and adore
With all the angels evermore.
Lord Jesus Christ, increase our faith
To praise Thy name through life and death.

263. The Christian Ministry is Divinely Instituted.

Take heed unto yourselves and to all the flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the Church of God, which He hath purchased with His own blood. *Acts 20, 28.*

God works saving faith through the office which preaches the Word of Reconciliation, that is, *the ministerial office.* And this ministerial office is a divine institution. For Paul says to the Corinthians: "God hath committed unto us the Word of Reconciliation. Now, then, we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us; we pray you in Christ's stead, Be ye reconciled to God." Hence, if God has committed the ministry to His servants, and if they are His ambassadors, the ministerial office must be *a divine institution.* It is God's will and ordinance that the Christians upon this earth should band together, form Christian congregations, and have capable men to whom they extend the ministerial call, and through whom they preach the Gospel publicly and administer the holy Sacraments. Did not Paul say to the elders, the preachers, at Ephesus: "The Holy Ghost hath made you overseers to feed the Church of God"? If the *Holy Ghost* has made the ministers overseers to feed the Church of God, must not their office be a *divine* institution?

Those sects, therefore, in the Christian Church which despise the ministerial office and refuse to call a minister, or to have a called and ordained servant of the Word preach to them and administer the Sacraments, are at fault and are at open variance with Scripture. They say that they do not believe in a salaried ministry; but how can they say this in the face of such plain statements as: "The laborer is worthy of his hire," or: "Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the Gospel shall live of the Gospel"? If they believe the plain words of the Bible, they must admit that the ministerial office is a divine institution. The tie uniting pastor and congregation is a sacred tie. Ministers are made overseers by the Holy Ghost. They are stewards of the mysteries of God and servants of Christ.

Prayer.

Lord, grant us Thy grace that the preaching of Thy Word may be effective with us. Thou hast given us the promise that Thy Word shall not return void, but accomplish that which pleases Thee and prosper in the thing whereto it has been sent. Let us receive Thy Word into a good and honest heart, with true devotion, that it may benefit us, edify us, bring us into closer communion with Thee, increase our faith, and endue us with power to lead a truly Christian life. Be Thou our Light on the path of life. Amen.

Shine on the darkened and the cold,
Recall the wand'rers from Thy fold,
Unite all those who walk apart
Confirm the weak and doubting heart.

So they with us may evermore
Such grace with wondering thanks adore
And endless praise to Thee be given
By all Thy Church in earth and heaven.

264. Pastors are Called and Installed by the Congregation.

And they gave forth their lots, and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles." *Acts 1, 26.*

Our Cathechism speaks of the called ministers of Christ. The congregations are to choose special ministers of the Word. The apostles were called and sent directly by Christ. Paul says of himself: "Paul, an apostle, not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised Him from the dead." But although the apostles were called directly by Christ, they afterwards had the appointments to this office made through election by the congregation. When a successor to Judas was to be chosen, they had the congregation nominate two candidates. Paul and Barnabas were set apart to preach in the heathen towns of Asia by the church of Antioch. When the apostles needed assistants in their work at Jerusalem, they had the congregation select the proper men. We read that the apostles ordained elders, or pastors, in every church whom the congregations had chosen by raising their hands, as indicated by the word used in the Greek text.

According to God's holy will every local congregation is to call and install its own pastor, its special minister of the Word. Later, under Popery, the congregations were deprived of their right to choose their own pastor. The bishops arrogated this right to themselves. According to the Word of God, however, the congregation has the power of the Word and therefore the right and duty to call such as are to exercise this power publicly, in other words, to appoint its own ministers. And when the ministers are rightly chosen, called, and installed, they are not servants of men, but "ministers of Christ and stewards of the mysteries of God." For as God sent Christ and Christ sent the Church and the Church sends its ministers, the called ministers are in reality sent and called by God. As Paul writes, Eph. 4: "He gave some pastors and teachers." And Peter exhorts: "Feed the flock of God which is among you."

Prayer.

Thanks be to Thee, O God, that we are no longer a shepherdless flock. Thou hast done wondrous things in Zion. Lead our hearts that we may love and honor the man who has come into our midst to labor for our souls' salvation. It is a hard, difficult task that has been placed upon his shoulders, and therefore we ought to do everything in our power to lighten his labors, to make his life pleasant among us; we shall give him that honor which, according to Thy Word, is justly due to one who is to watch for our souls. Amen.

What I have done and taught do thou
To do and teach endeavor;
So shall My kingdom flourish now
And God be praised forever.
Take heed lest men with base alloy
The heavenly treasure should destroy;
This counsel I bequeath thee.

265. Who Are Faithful Ministers, or Pastors?

It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful. *1 Cor. 4, 2.*

Faithfulness is required in the minister, — nothing more, but also nothing less. He must, in the first place, be faithful to God, his Master, who has entrusted the stewardship to him. He himself should be a true believer, thoroughly convinced of the Gospel-truth. The age in which we live demands not only an enlightened, but also an earnest ministry; for it is an age of earnestness and excitement. Men now feel and think with more energy than formerly. There is an increased fervor of mind in every department of life. A new spirit of improvement is abroad. Multitudes, unwilling to abide the time when desired changes will be made by the government, are taking the work of reform into their own hands. To suit our age, a minister must communicate religion with that reality, that life and power which accompany truth drawn from a man's own soul. We ought to speak of religion as something which we ourselves know and believe. An unbelieving minister is an unfaithful servant.

Furthermore, faithfulness over against the mysteries of God which are entrusted to him is required of a minister. He should proclaim the Word of God in its truth and purity and administer the holy Sacraments in conformity with Christ's institution. A minister is a commissioned representative and spokesman of the Lord of lords and King of kings. The faithful minister must proclaim the Law and show that all, even the best of men, are damnable sinners and set forth the Gospel to show that in Christ Jesus, who died for our sins, there is salvation for all.

And, lastly, faithfulness to the flock which God has entrusted to his care is required of the minister. He should serve all members of his flock to the best of his ability, do for them all he can in order that they may reach the goal of eternal life, comfort them when they are distressed, warn them when they are beginning to go astray, and, in general, attend to their spiritual needs. If you find your pastor doing this, do not require more of him.

Prayer.

O Thou great Shepherd of the sheep, do not suffer our preachers and teachers to speak what they please, but guide their tongues and hearts, so that at all times they may speak what is pleasing unto Thee. "Give to Thy Word impressive power," and also to Thy holy Sacraments, that we may regard and esteem them as the blessed means of our salvation, which are able to save our souls. Give us at all times ministers who firmly abide by Thy Word, the preaching of which is entrusted to them; who are instant in season and out of season; who reprove, rebuke, and exhort with all long-suffering and doctrine; who rightly divide the Word of Truth, preaching the Law to secure sinners and the Gospel to such as are alarmed and terrified on account of their sins and desire to escape the wrath of God. Grant us zeal and earnestness to pray for such servants of Thy Word. Amen.

Send Thou, O Lord, to every place
Swift messengers before Thy face,
The heralds of Thy wondrous grace,
Where Thou Thyself wilt come.

266. What the Hearers Owe to Their Pastors.

Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things. *Gal. 6, 6.*

Christ said to His apostles: "He that heareth you heareth Me, and he that despiseth you despiseth Me; and he that despiseth Me despiseth Him that sent Me." Do you honor your pastor for Christ's sake, whose servant he is? Do you bear in mind that the called ministers of Christ deal with you by His divine command? Do you respect the office in the man and treat him accordingly? The apostle says: "Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honor, especially they who labor in the Word and doctrine."

Furthermore, the ministers of Christ are to be regarded as the stewards of the mysteries of God. Does it look as though you considered your pastor a steward of the mysteries of God if for months you do not come to church to hear him proclaim the counsel of God unto your salvation and if you will let him run after you and urge you to partake of the Lord's Supper. Is it not rather an insult to your pastor to act as if you did not care for his sermons and personal admonition; and, worse than that, is the neglect of God's Word and Sacrament not an open contempt of God? Respect the ministerial office as you should; heed the Word of God, which says: "Obey them that have the rule over you and submit yourselves; for they watch for your souls as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy and not with grief; for that is unprofitable for you."

Finally, the Lord has said through his holy apostle that "they which preach the Gospel should live of the Gospel." The pastor is to be kept free from bodily care; for the Scripture says: "Let him that is taught in the Word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things." The pastor is to have a salary in accordance with the means of the congregation; for Luke 10, 7 the Lord says: "Eat and drink such things as they give; for the laborer is worthy of his hire." Indeed, their salaries should enable them to make provision also for the future.

Prayer.

Grant, O God, that all hearers of Thy Word may receive it from the mouths of their ministers not only with due attention, reverence, and meekness, but at all times also yield their hearts to Thee in such quietness and meekness as will permit the Holy Spirit to accomplish the work of faith in them, true faith, which is not dead, but rich in deeds of Christian charity and good works. Let them also see their duty to provide for their pastors and teachers when they are sick and aged. Amen.

Bring your loving gifts to Jesus,
Willing let them be,
Once for you His life He offered —
Died on Calvary.
Turn not from His gentle pleading,
Though your store be small;
From His great and wondrous bounty
God provides your all.

267. Follow God's Word; Follow It Alone.

Ye shall observe to do therefore as the Lord, your God, hath commanded you; ye shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. *Deut. 5, 32.*

A common temptation for a Christian is: Why insist so strictly upon every letter of God's commandments? If the narrow path leads up hill, why not use a little tact and judgment occasionally and go around the hill? Why should I exclude myself from all contact with the world?

Have you sometimes thought that you ought to yield to such temptations of the flesh? Oh, then be warned! What a dangerous mistake that would be! It would at once enmesh you in the greatest of difficulties. Behold the consequences of following God's Word, but not following it alone! There is a minister, for instance, who insists upon submitting to every word of Holy Scripture in doctrine and life; but in one point he weakens. He fears that if he opposes some of the unchristian societies, his congregation will not grow. He admits members belonging to such societies, or rather suffers them to be admitted, and before he is aware of it, the lodge-members are the ruling power in his congregation. — There is a young lady who is a regular attendant at church and who obeys her parents. She also avoids bad company — except the company of one, without whom she thinks she cannot live. A marriage ensues, and soon, for the sake of the ungodly husband, the promising Christian has fallen from the faith. — There is a Christian whose soul is filled with the love of Christ. But he makes one little mistake. He thinks that every fellow-Christian must love

Christ with the same zeal, the same sincerity, and the same faithfulness as he himself. And when he finds that his fellow-Christians still have serious faults, he is embittered against them and begins to loathe their company, and before he is aware of it, he finds himself estranged from the church and his Savior.

These examples warn us not to follow our own inclinations. But oh, how simple and easy everything becomes if we decide to be guided by nothing but by God's Word alone!

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou art everywhere, and Thy kingdom reigns supreme. But we are still pilgrims in this vale of tears, in a world that lies in wickedness and which Thou didst overcome, as Thou Thyself hast said. Where, now, is the way that takes us safely through to Thee? How shall we, O Lord, find this way unless Thou, by Thy Spirit, dost teach us and by Him dost lead us to follow Thy Word, and Thy Word alone? What else can comfort us when the day of trial comes, when afflictions and temptations are at hand? Let Thy Word be unto us the Joy and Rejoicing of our hearts. Amen.

May Thy rich grace impart
Strength to my fainting heart,
  My zeal inspire.
As Thou hast died for me,
O may my love for Thee
Pure, warm, and changeless be,
  A living fire!

268. What Is Confession?

If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. *1 John 1, 9.*

"Confession embraces two parts: one is that we confess our sins; the other, that we receive absolution, or forgiveness." Every sin that may be committed is a sin against God. If our sins are to be forgiven, God must forgive them. God, however, has given this power to the Christian Church and its ministers. They can forgive sins, not of their own power, but by the command and in the stead of God and our Savior. To the Church the Lord says: "Whosesoever sins ye remit, they are remitted unto them." The penitent sinner should therefore confess his sins to the local church, or to its minister, and from the church, or its minister, receive the absolution, or forgiveness, as from God Himself.

If one looks at this precious doctrine only in a perverted form, such as preached, taught, and practised by the Romish Church, which requires the penitent sinner to enumerate all his sins to the priest, it is no wonder he will turn away in disgust. The papists have succeeded in making the confessional a place to be dreaded, and it is not to be wondered at that those who constantly have before their minds this horrible caricature of confession and never yet went to the trouble of studying the Lutheran, that is, the Scriptural, doctrine, take offense at it. The Lutheran Church does not hold it necessary, indeed, not even possible, to recount all sins one has committed.

We read in the Augsburg Confession, Article 25: "Of Confession they teach that an enumeration of sins is not necessary and that consciences be not burdened with anxiety to enumerate all sins; for it is impossible to recount all sins, as the psalm testifies, 19, 13: 'Who can understand his errors?' Also Jeremiah, 17, 9: 'The heart is deceitful; who can know it?' But if no sins were forgiven except those that are recounted, consciences could never find peace; for very many sins they neither see nor can remember." Ministers are commanded to remit sins, but not to investigate secret sins.

Prayer.

O Lord, omniscient God, the first requisite for a penitent heart is that it recognize its sins and feel sorry and penitent over them. Therefore, above all things we bow our knees before Thee and call upon Thee to open our eyes that we may thoroughly recognize the multitude and magnitude of our sins. We pray in the words of David: "Search me, O God, and know my heart; try me and know my thoughts; and see if there be any wicked way in me and lead me in the way everlasting." We thank Thee, Lord Jesus, for Thy infinite love, that Thou hast rendered full satisfaction for all our sins, procuring a perfect forgiveness of all of them. Amen.

Higher than the highest heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea,
Lord, Thy love at last has conquered:
None of self and all of Thee.

269. Return unto the Lord, Thy God!

I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely; for Mine anger is turned away from him. *Hos. 14, 4.*

"Now is the accepted time; now is the day of salvation." "Seek ye the Lord while He may be found; call ye upon Him while He is near," before the night cometh, the night when grace will no longer be offered. Men hear the invitation, but many, steeped in their earthly pursuits, turn a deaf ear to it; some hasten to enter in; some postpone it from one time to another.

Have you sinned, and does your heart long to be reconciled to God? Then remember His grace and mercy in Christ Jesus and never suffer your soul to lose sight of it. Strive to enter in at the strait gate. The open gate is before you. Christ is preached to you. Even to-day He calls you to return to Him, to repent and believe the Gospel. Neglect not His calling. Return now, enter in, and do not put it off for a future time. The longer you tarry, the less will there be a probability of your ever returning and entering in, and when death comes and the door of heaven is shut, it will remain shut.

What must we do? Cast ourselves on the mercy of God, and His mercy we must trust. Though our sins are red like crimson, though they are as numberless as the sands of the seashore, the mercy of God is still greater. No sin can be committed by man which would be so great that the grace of God could not put it away. "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?" The Son of God is more precious than all the treasures of this earth put together, and since God spared not the most precious which He had, how, then, should we doubt His mercy? Do not think yourself too insignificant to be taken notice of by the great God. "He remembereth that we are dust." God does not overlook the dust, He remembers it, and it tends to the glorification of His name among men to raise the humble out of the dust and to adorn them with royal apparel. If you return to Him, He will cover all your sins. His anger is turned from you. His mercy is as high as the heavens.

Prayer.

O my heavenly Father, for the sake of Thy dear Son, my Savior Jesus Christ, receive me again into grace and do not let

His bitter sufferings and death and the perfect, precious ransom which He has paid Thee for my sins be lost upon me poor sinner, but be effectual in me. I am indeed an unworthy sinner, but by Thy grace, for the sake of my Lord and Redeemer I shall not perish, but have everlasting life; for Thy mercy and my Savior's love is more than sufficient to cover all my sins. In eternity I will laud and praise Thee for this Thy grace and love. Amen.

O fallen, yet not lost,
Canst thou forget the life for thee laid down,
The taunts, the scourging, and the thorny crown?
When o'er thee first My spotless robe I spread
And poured the Oil of Joy upon thy head,
How did thy wakening heart within thee burn!
Canst thou remember all and not return?

270. Absolution.

He that covereth his sins shall not prosper; but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy. *Prov. 28, 13.*

We receive absolution, or forgiveness, from the pastor as from God Himself and should in no wise doubt, but firmly believe, that by it our sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

When ministers thus announce the forgiveness of sins, are the sins then really and truly forgiven? Most assuredly. Christ says it in so many words: "Whosesoever sins *ye* remit, they are remitted unto them." The words of absolution are Christ's words, and they are not an empty sound; they convey what they express. In absolution the forgiveness of sins is extended to each and every one of those to whom it is announced. Never can the words of Jesus Christ be false, nor can they be empty; they always bring and do what they say.

But how can ministers forgive sins? Ministers are not masters, they are Christ's stewards, and they are not stewards of empty garners nor of shadows and emblems; they are stewards of real goods. Being stewards of genuine goods, they deal out actual forgiveness in the words of absolution. But it is not the steward's, but the Master's forgiveness; for His are both the words and the goods. As surely as Christ's words are true, so truly do they bring what they say — the remission of sins. After the World War a message of pardon was proclaimed by King George throughout India. In that message he said: "I direct my viceroy to exercise, in my name and on my behalf, my royal clemency to political offenders in the fullest measure." These words were not an empty proclamation stating that a man might obtain pardon and liberty from imprisonment; it was in fact the pardon, that is, the pardon was conveyed by these words themselves. All that the inhabitants of India had to do was to accept, and make use of, the pardon which was brought to them in that message. And when the king's viceroy proclaimed that pardon, it was the *king's* pardon. Thus the forgiveness proclaimed by the pastor is *Christ's* forgiveness.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou hast procured forgiveness of sins for all sinners by the shedding of Thy blood and by Thy death, and hast sealed it by Thy resurrection. This Thou hast commanded to be preached and to be administered throughout the world by means of the Gospel. Now, when my pastor absolves me, he does nothing else than proclaim to me the Gospel of the forgiveness of sins; and this is not an empty announcement, but it actually offers and conveys to me the forgiveness of sins. Praised be Thy holy name for this grace and love. Amen.

Jesus, give me true repentance
By Thy Spirit come from heav'n.
Whisper this transporting sentence,
"Son, thy sins are all forgiv'n."

However great the sins may be,
The absolution sets us free,
Appointed by God's own dear Son
To bring the pardon He has won.

271. Do Also Hypocrites Receive Forgiveness?

Let favor be shown to the wicked, yet will he not learn righteousness; in the land of uprightness will he deal unjustly and will not behold the majesty of the Lord. *Is. 26, 10.*

It frequently happens that also hypocrites come to confession. The Lord complains: "This people draweth nigh unto Me with their mouth and honoreth Me with their lips, but their heart is far from Me." A hypocrite is a person who feigns to be what he is not. Hypocrisy in religion, accordingly, is acting outwardly as though one were a Christian while at heart one is not, being without faith. How detestable to try to appear outwardly what inwardly one is not! Such a person goes to church, but he does not go there to hear the Word of God. He does everything, or at least many things, that are expected of a genuine member of a Christian congregation, but only to hear his heart flatter him with a recital of his good works, as did that Pharisee in the Temple. He goes to confession, but not for the purpose of confessing his sins, humbling himself before God, and praying: "God be merciful to me, a sinner," as did that publican. He goes to be seen by the people; or he goes to offer unto God Cain's offering; or he goes to assist in making the house of prayer a den of thieves, for there are those who serve the golden calf in the very face of the crucifix and under the sound of the Gospel. It will be a terrible awakening for these sacrificing fools when the Judge shall accost them: "Depart from Me, ye that work iniquity!"

Such hypocrites do not receive forgiveness of sins through the word of absolution. The grace of God is offered also to them in absolution, but they do not accept it with a believing heart. We know from the Word of God that true faith in Jesus Christ must dwell in the heart of man. It is possible to deceive men, but it is impossible to deceive God, who knows the thoughts of the heart. God will not be content with a mere profession of the mouth. Be sure, therefore, that the confession of your mouth proceeds from the heart. The impenitent sinner, in absolution, does not obtain God's grace and forgiveness, but His wrath and displeasure abides on him. May the Lord save us all from hypocrisy and its terrible doom and keep us in the true faith unto our end!

Prayer.

O my God, do not let me perish under the load of my sin, nor despair as did Cain and Judas, but turn to me and be gracious unto me and forgive all my sins. Show unto me, I pray Thee, Thy fatherly heart of love and mercy, which has no pleasure in the death of the wicked, but earnestly desires that he turn from his way and live. Speak kindly to my soul, saying Thou wilt show mercy, in place of dealing out justice, and for Jesus Christ's sake nevermore remember my transgressions. Amen.

O lay to heart this wondrous thought,
Through what sore agony
And death was your redemption bought,
And to your Savior flee
Ere 'tis too late. The world disown
And fix your love on Christ alone
And do His will; for at the final doom
Those who dishonored Him shall wrath consume.

272. Beware of Merely Nominal Christianity.

Not every one that saith unto Me, Lord, Lord, shall enter into the kingdom of heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father which is in heaven. *Matt. 7, 21.*

Luther once complained of the "great crowd which listens to God's Word as though it were a mere trifle, and hear the preaching of the Word of God only from custom and at the end of the year know as little of it as at the beginning." Luther here speaks of merely nominal Christians, who pay no homage to their Creator and show a great lack of reverence.

Let us beware of nominal Christianity. Let us not overlook a danger to which we are particularly exposed. Or is there no danger that the true doctrine which we have received be with us merely a matter of the memory and understanding and not a living power moving and changing the heart? We have received the true doctrine as our particular heritage. We know that in the true doctrine we have the true Christ and the true way to eternal life. In this very manner of receiving the true doctrine a danger is lurking; for what is obtained at small cost is generally little appreciated. Those who through many conflicts have come to the knowledge of the truth realize its inestimable value, whereas with their children, who received it through them, it is apt to be a dead treasure, little or not at all tasted and hence little appreciated. Do our souls also know the value of the treasure we have inherited? Unhappy the man who professes the Gospel-truth before men, but in his own heart values it not, or whose own soul is indifferent to it and loathes it!

Shall we be found as people knowing the truth and loving it not? The Gospel-truth must not be a light in the understanding only; it must burn in the heart, enlightening the soul with the hope that maketh not ashamed. We must practise it in our daily lives. Deeds speak louder than words. Vain and idle the profession which is not carried out in practise. "For if any be a hearer of the Word and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass; for he beholdeth himself and goeth his way and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was." O beware of such merely nominal Christianity!

Prayer.

Grant, O Lord, that the consciousness of being Thy child may ever be my comfort against Satan, sin, and death, and may I value it more highly than all worldly honor or temporal dignity; may I conform my life thereto and finally die a Christian death! Let me not only say with my month, Lord, Lord; but let me do Thy will from my whole heart, enduring in the true Christian faith unto the end. Let me not become like those who, when they hear the Word, form all kinds of good resolves for the moment, but when the sound of the Word has died away, forget their good resolves, and the picture of a true Christian which they beheld passes out of their mind, and they lose their priceless treasure. Let me be both a hearer and a doer of the Word. Amen.

Jesus, Thou art mine forever,
Suffer not myself to stray;
Let me in my weakness never
Cast my priceless pearl away.

273. Consider Your Station According to the Ten Commandments.

By the Law is the knowledge of sin. *Rom. 3, 20.*

Before you confess your sins, you must first have a true knowledge of your sins. For if you do not really *know* your sins, you cannot *confess* them as you should. Therefore you must examine yourself before you confess, that you may truly know your sins.

Sincere self-examination in the light of the Ten Commandments will show every one, be his station and calling whatever it may, that he has sinned much against God and man. Luther gives us the following instruction for examining ourselves before confession: "Here consider your station according to the Ten Commandments, whether you are a father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, servant; whether you have been disobedient, unfaithful, slothful; whether you have grieved any person by word or deed; whether you have stolen, neglected or wasted aught or done other injury." This instruction is short and good.

First consider the station in which God has placed you here on earth. Are you father, mother, son, daughter, master, mistress, servant? Or what is your special calling? Then take the Ten Commandments with their explanation as you find them in your Catechism. Learn from them what is your duty as a Christian and child of God in your proper station and calling; examine carefully what God has commanded you to do or not to do in each of His commandments. You surely will find many transgressions of the divine Law. Its existence must call forth shame and sorrow. But it is not enough that there be simply shame and sorrow. Both must be deep, thorough. Not a single sin must be excepted. Then consider your station as a Christian, as a disciple of Christ. Again take the Ten Commandments. Learn from them what is your duty as a child of God towards God and your neighbor. Will you not find a multitude of transgressions? And does not God threaten to punish the transgressors? Is not every sin an abomination in the sight of God? Did not His Son have to suffer on the cross for every sin?

Prayer.

O heavenly Father, since the days of my youth I have transgressed Thy commandments and, alas! am doing so to this day, having within me my sinful flesh, the Old Adam. But I take comfort, dear Lord, in the boundless, unsearchable, infinite, and unspeakable grace and mercy which Thou hast promised in Thy Word to all penitent sinners for the sake of the precious merits of Thine only-begotten Son. Let me always approach the Lord's Table with a contrite heart, and cling to Jesus alone as my only Savior. Amen.

Whoso to this board repaireth
Take good heed how he prepareth;
Death instead of life shall he
Receive who comes unworthily.

Thou shalt hold with faith unshaken
That this food is to be taken
By the sick who are distressed,
By those whose heart is sin-oppressed.

274. Avoid Sinning Against Conscience.

Sanctify the Lord God in your hearts and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear, having a good conscience. *1 Pet. 3, 15. 16.*

Always be conscientious! Do what your conscience, taught by God's Word, approves of. Cultivate conscience, and it will learn to respond instantly. It will become a faithful monitor, and if you have been instructed in the truth and continually hear it, you will know at all times what to do — and do it. You cannot remain a moral being and act against your conscience. If, for example, you know that you ought to do more for the Church, but you put down that feeling by vain excuses, or if you refuse to separate from the world, — you know these things, you have heard them time and again, — then you stifle your conscience. What are you therefore? A moral wreck!

When a man who is not a Christian acts against his conscience he does not actually lose a good conscience, because he had none before; he only loads his conscience with still greater guilt; but when Christians act against their conscience, their good conscience is gone, their faith has been wrecked. They know it is wrong not to obey the voice of their Scripture-taught conscience; it has often been told them. Their conscience reproves them, too, but they always put it down. In consequence of this the voice of their conscience becomes feebler and feebler and finally is quieted altogether, and the poor unfortunate souls think they have a good conscience because the preaching no longer hurts them. The apostle admonishes all Christians to have a *good* conscience. A good conscience is one that is in true working order, voicing approval of whatever is done in the Lord. To sin against conscience is to stifle the voice of conscience. Here sins of weakness are not included, that is to say, when a man is overtaken in a fault. A man may grow angry before conscience can even raise its warning voice, and that is not putting away conscience. If an evil thought or desire arises in you and you put that evil lust down, that is heeding the voice of conscience; but if you are about to use profane language and the voice within you says, It is sin, and you nevertheless do it, then you stifle the voice of conscience. Spots in the conscience are troublesome things. They can be washed away only by the atoning blood of Jesus Christ, the Son of God.

Prayer.

O holy Trinity, Thou hast kindled a new life within me. Let not, I pray Thee, any of my future days be marred by mortal sin. Grant patience in sufferings and trials. Comfort me in every misfortune and distress. Daily grant me, I beseech Thee, forgiveness of sins and a steadfast faith that I may serve Thee unto the end with a good conscience. Let me never sin against my conscience, make shipwreck of faith, and cease to be a Christian. Amen.

O God, Thou faithful God,
Thou Fount that ever flowest,
Without whom nothing is,
Who all good gifts bestowest —

A pure and healthy frame
O give me, and within
A conscience free from blame,
A soul unhurt by sin.

275. The General Confession.

Who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults. *Ps. 19, 12.*

The minister asks the confessing congregation whether it is their sincere confession that they truly repent of their sins, believe in Jesus Christ, and earnestly and sincerely purpose, with the aid of God the Holy Ghost, henceforth to amend their sinful lives. After all have answered with a loud yes, the minister proceeds: "Upon this your confession I, by virtue of my office, as a called and ordained servant of the Word, announce the grace of God unto all of you, and in the stead and by the command of my Lord Jesus Christ I forgive you all your sins in the name of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Ghost. Amen."

When you go to this confession, you must not content yourself with repeating, by rote, the memorized words of confession or with having your pastor repeat them to you, but you must bring with you a penitent heart, from which a genuine confession will issue of itself. To offer confession when the heart is impenitent is simply mocking God, and without a penitent heart there is no forgiveness of sins. Let us, then, give God our heart. He will gladly accept it. He asks and demands it when He says: "My son, give Me thy heart and let thine eyes observe My ways." But how can we give God our heart? The heart is the seat of our affections, the seat of love. To give God our heart is to love Him. By nature our hearts are alienated from God. By nature we have left the house of the Father like the prodigal son, and our hearts cling to sin, the world, and its evil lusts. We must, therefore, tear away our heart from the world and from sin and return to our heavenly Father and say: "Father, I have sinned against Thee and am no more worthy to be called Thy son." Yea, before God we should plead guilty of all sins, even of those which we do not know and feel in our hearts. We have sinned against all the commandments of God. But when you have made your confession and hear the voice of absolution, you should in no wise doubt, but firmly believe, that it is God Himself who forgives you through the confessor, or pastor.

Prayer.

O gracious and benignant God, eternal Father, I humbly pray Thee that, according to Thy fatherly love towards me, Thou wouldest nevermore remember against me all that I have transgressed against Thee, but graciously remit all my sins. Be merciful to me because of Thy Son, Jesus Christ, who is Surety for all my sins. Hide me, body and soul, in His holy wounds; cleanse me from all my sins and preserve me in all good works. O Lord God, who can understand his errors? Cleanse Thou me from secret faults and refresh me with the heavenly dew of Thy grace. Without Thee I cannot be saved. Let me daily seek forgiveness of my sins through Jesus Christ. Amen.

Nothing in my hand I bring,
Simply to Thy cross I cling;
Naked, come to Thee for dress;
Helpless, look to Thee for grace;
Foul, I to the Fountain fly:
Wash me, Savior, or I die!

276. Confessing My Sins to My Neighbor.

Confess your faults one to another. ***Jas. 5, 16.***

Since Christians are and remain sinners as long as they live, they will also sometimes wrong one another. Christians, too, have their faults, and even the smallest fault is a fault just the same, and it hurts us. This should not be, of course. Christians should not wrong anybody and should live in perfect harmony and peace among themselves. But who can deny the fact or change it? This imperfect state of affairs will remain as long as the devil, the world, and our own flesh exist.

What, then, is to be done when a Christian has wronged another? The children of this world will say, "I will not lower myself and apologize, I will not grovel in the dust for anybody. It wasn't so bad; he has worse faults than I." Is it right for Christians to act that way? No; the Bible says: "Confess your faults one to another." Confessing a fault is making half amends. Denying a fault doubles it. How can you expect to please God if you refuse to ask your neighbor for his pardon when you have offended and grieved him? He who is not willing to do this thereby clearly shows that in the sight of God also he is not truly penitent of his sin. Let such an impenitent sinner listen to the words of his Savior. Matt. 5, 23. 24 He says: "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift." These words of the Savior are clear. He says, "Go and be reconciled to thy brother." Before you offer confession to God, go and confess your sins to your neighbor whom you have offended and grieved and ask his pardon. Without any further delay you must sincerely confess to him the wrong committed against him and apologize in Christian humility. It may seem very hard for you to do that. Our flesh and blood does not like it. And often the offended neighbor makes it still harder by his unwillingness to forgive. But do not mind that; look up to Christ, He wills it; His Spirit reminds you of your Christian duty — do not resist!

Prayer.

O merciful Jesus, moved by Thy grace, I go to confession and absolution for the remission of sins. But I recall Thine earnest words: "If thou bring thy gift to the altar and there rememberest that thy brother hath aught against thee, leave there thy gift before the altar and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift." Grant me Thy grace and so rule me that my heart may be inclined to reconciliation, abstaining from all wrath. Amen.

If thou this believest truly
And confession makest duly,
Thou a welcome guest art here,
This heavenly food thy soul shall cheer.

But the fruits must not be missing,
Love thy neighbor without ceasing;
That true love let him receive
Which here to thee thy God doth give.

277. How a Christian Should Heartily Forgive Those who Offend Him.

Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven. ***Luke 6, 37.***

What is to be done when a Christian has been wronged by another? The children of this world have a general rule in such cases, which is, "Go for him, hit him back, get even with him, make him suffer for it!" Shall Christians do the same thing? Shall they take revenge upon their fellow-Christians when they have been wronged? No; Jesus says, Forgive. "Forgive ye every one his brother their trespasses." "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven." But if you do not forgive, you are a wicked servant, a Christian in name only, but not in reality. This is what Jesus means to impress on our minds by the parable of the wicked servant. Matt. 18, 23—35. That servant found one of his fellow-servants who owed him a paltry sum, only a trifle compared with the overwhelming debt which he had owed to his lord; and he laid hands on him and took him by the throat, saying, "Pay me that thou owest!"

Is not this our own picture? The wrongs done to us by others are sins, it is true, debts; and those who have sinned against us must answer to God for it. But how small, how insignificant, is that debt compared with the great debt which God, in His boundless grace, forgave us! Why, then, make a great ado about those wrongs done to you? Is it not pride and selfishness that lie at the bottom of it? When an offense is committed against God or against others, most men are not much wrought up about it; but when the offense is directed against their own person, they act as if it were the greatest crime. And what violence and cruelty do men often resort to when a wrong has been committed against their persons! The wicked servant takes his fellow-servant by the throat and ill-treats him for a few paltry coppers! You say, you are not doing that when you refuse to forgive those who have trespassed against you? Not to forgive means that your fellow-servant's sins are to remain, that his debt is to stand, and that he is to suffer the consequences; and what else is that than to take him by the throat and to cast him into prison and not to be concerned about him even if he should be eternally lost?

Let us therefore not attempt to belittle the wickedness of a harsh, hard, unforgiving heart.

Prayer.

I humbly entreat Thee, O Lord, to take out of my flesh the heart of stone and to give me a heart of flesh, a heart of love and reconciliation. Make of me a person who loves his enemy, blesses those who curse him, does good to those who hate him, and prays for those who despitefully use him and persecute him. Oh, let me ever be mindful of Judgment Day and of the strict account I must render that I may abandon the enmity and agree with mine adversary and not let the sun go down upon my wrath. Amen.

Naught, naught, dear Lord, could move Thee
To leave Thy rightful place
Save love, for which I love Thee;
A love that could embrace
A world where sorrow dwelleth,
Which sin and suffering fill,
More than the tongue e'er telleth; —
Yet Thou couldst love it still!

278. Let Our Confession Be in Earnest.

I acknowledged my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord; and Thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin. *Ps. 32, 5.*

All the days of our life God has been faithful and has showered His grace and mercy upon us. Have you been as grateful as you should have been? Have you grown in faith, in love, and in good works? Do you gladly hear His voice when He speaks to you through His called ministers? Have you shown due interest in His Church and its work? Have you been as regular as you should be in your church attendance? Do you follow in the way in which God would have you walk? Does your heart still cling to Him, your God and Savior, who dearly loves you and has sealed His undying love for you with His own heart's blood? Examine your hearts; God proves every heart; you cannot deceive Him. How have you dealt with Him? And how have you dealt with your neighbor? If your confession is in earnest, you will admit that you did not fear, love, and trust in God above all things, and that you did not love your neighbor so uprightly as yourself; rather that self-love, the quest for personal gain and honor, was the motive power of all your actions.

Now, when you notice these and other sins in yourself, you certainly will be terrified in your conscience and experience sorrow and contrition for having offended your loving God so grievously and repaid His mercies with such base ingratitude. You will say with the psalmist: "I acknowledge my sin unto Thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the Lord." If we consider how gracious and merciful our God has been to us, how with patience and long-suffering He has borne with us for years, and how ill we have repaid Him for His loving-kindness, how time and again we have fallen into sin and added transgression to transgression, should we not feel heartily ashamed of ourselves? Should not our hearts be filled with sorrow and genuine remorse? Let our confession, then, be in earnest. Let us fall down upon our knees in true repentance and confide to our heavenly Father all those things which weigh heavily upon our souls.

Prayer.

O Thou merciful God, how shall I properly praise Thee? I will give Thee a broken and contrite heart, full of sin, red as scarlet, but also full of sorrow and contrition; graciously accept it, I pray Thee, wash it white as snow in the precious blood of Thy dear Son, my Redeemer, and conceal it in His holy, innocent wounds, thus conveying to me the forgiveness of all my sins. O Lord God, turn not against me in Thy wrath and let not Thy mercy with me come to an end. Grant to me Thy grace for the sake of Thy own dear Son, who was delivered for our offenses and raised again for our justification. Amen.

I, a sinner, come to Thee
And acknowledge my transgression;
Tender mercy show to me,
Grant me graciously remission;
Let these words my soul relieve:
Jesus sinners doth receive.

279. We Should Not Doubt God's Forgiveness.

If Thou, Lord, shouldest mark iniquities, O Lord, who shall stand? But there is forgiveness with Thee that Thou mayest be feared. *Ps. 130, 3. 4.*

When you hear the word of absolution after you have confessed your sins, you should in no wise doubt, but *firmly believe,* that by it your sins are forgiven before God in heaven.

But what if a Christian cannot firmly believe, if he cannot come to a cheerful trust in the grace of God, and is not certain about his forgiveness? He tries firmly to believe, but he cannot. He does not venture it. He is afraid to offer his confession and receive absolution. He cannot think it possible that such plenary forgiveness as the word of absolution offers is meant for him. What miserable condition!

Whence these doubts as to the grace and forgiveness of God? Maybe you are a rascal, holding secretly to a sin of which you know that God has forgiven it. In that case, of course, you have forfeited the comfort of God's grace and forgiveness. "If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us." "He that covereth his sins shall not prosper." "Blessed is the man in whose spirit there is no guile. When I kept silence, my bones waxed old through my roaring all the day long. For day and night Thy hand was heavy upon me; my moisture is turned into the drought of summer."

Or maybe you do something which is not of faith, that is, you are not certain, but doubt, whether it is right before God, and yet you do it. Also in this case you cannot comfort yourself with the grace and forgiveness of God; for Scripture says: "He that *doubteth* is damned if he eateth, because he eateth not of faith; for whatsoever is not of faith is *sin.*" Rom. 14, 23.

If, however, it is the doubting of a little faith which says: "Lord, I believe; help Thou mine unbelief," then be not afraid, because also weak faith is true faith. Yea, those who have a weak faith should especially come to confession and accept absolution and the means of grace that their weak faith may grow stronger.

Prayer.

O Lord, I come upon Thy will and command, bringing all my petitions, even those very things that hinder and would prevent my coming to Thee, my sins that trouble me greatly, and I ask Thee to remove and forgive them. O Lord God, grant that I may not doubt Thy forgiveness. Let me firmly believe and trust in Thy grace and forgiveness. I feel that I am wanting in this faith, desiring to believe, but yet not able to do so. I therefore pray Thee for this faith, knowing that Thou art willing to give it to me; for Thou hast promised to hear my prayer, and Thy promise will never fail me. Amen.

As the shining rainbow
After storm appears,
God will keep His promise
Through the endless years.

280. God Is Faithful.

The Word of the Lord is right, and all His works are done in truth. *Ps. 33, 4.*

God is true and faithful in all things. His love does not change. All the promises of God are fulfilled and made true. "God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of His Son Jesus Christ, our Lord." 1 Cor. 1, 9. God is the Source of all truth and veracity. When He speaks, every word is as true as Himself. It is impossible for God to lie. The Apostle Paul writes to the Romans: "Let God be true, but every man a liar, as it is written, That Thou mightest be justified in Thy sayings."

But not only is it impossible for God to lie, it also is impossible for Him to feel sorry for anything He has said, threatened, or promised. 1 Sam. 15, 29 we read: "The Strength of Israel will not lie nor repent; for He is not a man that He should repent." Men often threaten or promise something for which they soon feel sorry and repent, because they changed their mind and saw that they could not keep their word. But it cannot happen to the eternal Spirit, infinite in wisdom, the God who governs upon earth and judges in the earth, in whose hands are the hearts of kings and the destinies of nations; the All-wise, who brings the counsel of the heathen to naught; the sovereign Lord, who determines all events and shapes the fate of every living soul. True, it is said of God that at the time of the Flood He repented having made man. It grieved Him to see that man had become so wicked. But it is impossible that God should repent like a man; He cannot change any word He has spoken. His Word is always true.

He is faithful. He will never change His kindness and mercy toward us. It is true what He promises Ps. 89, 34: "My covenant will I not break nor alter the thing that is gone out of My lips." Let us, therefore, cling to this faithful God as our Refuge, and say: "The Lord is my Fortress, my God; in Him will I trust." "Cast all your care upon Him, for He careth for you." 1 Pet. 5, 7.

Prayer.

I thank Thee, Lord, my faithful God, with my whole heart and continually honor Thy name. I called unto Thee, and Thou hast heard my voice, and my cry did enter into Thine ears, and Thou hast comforted me. Thou hast faithfully stood by me, graciously upheld my soul, and delivered me. O Thou faithful

God, help me, by Thy Spirit, to pay my vows and never to forget what Thou hast done for my soul, that I may not only spread Thy praise while in this mortal frame, but also sing everlasting hallelujahs to Thee. Amen.

> Praise Him for His grace and favor
> To our fathers in distress;
> Praise Him still the same as ever,
> Slow to chide and swift to bless;
> Praise Him who repenteth never,
> Glorious in His faithfulness!

281. Having Received Forgiveness, We Must Amend Our Sinful Lives.

Put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. *Eph. 4, 24.*

Having received forgiveness, you should live in daily repentance and daily flee in true faith to your merciful Savior Jesus Christ, who bled and died on the cross for your transgressions; you should pray to Him daily and be diligent in hearing the Word of God, which can save your immortal soul. You should also do good to others. You should not let an opportunity for doing good pass by. The apostle says: "As we have opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." If you are the father of a family, you should work and make a living for those who are dependent on you; for God says: "If any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel." If you are a mother, you should attend to your household affairs and your children. If you are a child, you should obey your parents. Whenever you are at a loss what to do, search for the will of God.

This is the great difference between the faithful Christians and the unbelieving children of this world, that the faithful Christians will always be guided by the will of God, while the worldling simply does as he pleases and does not care for the will of God, but laughs at those who are so scrupulous and careful lest they might do wrong. A really penitent Christian, having received forgiveness, cannot forget how kind, lenient, and merciful his heavenly Father has been towards him; how great was the mass of filth Christ's blood daily washed away; how the Holy Spirit has had to labor at his soul to cleanse it and to make it a source of good thoughts and deeds. The more he learns to appreciate this boundless grace and loving-kindness of God, the more eager he will be to amend his sinful life and to show his thankfulness towards God. No one in this world has more cause to be thankful than the Christian.

Prayer.

O Jesus, my Redeemer, restore unto me the joy of Thy salvation and uphold me with Thy free Spirit in the fixed purpose to amend my sinful life and to serve Thee all the days of my life in holiness and righteousness pleasing to Thee. I have great cause to be thankful; for my sins are forgiven, my transgressions are covered, and unto me Thou imputest not iniquity. I know that Thou wilt always hear my prayers and wilt finally receive me unto Thyself in heaven. For Thy sake I am a blessed child of the heavenly Father and an heir of eternal salvation. Amen.

My soul to health He doth restore,
In paths of right He goes before,
And leadeth, ever near me.
Yea, though I walk within death's vale,
No evil thing shall make me quail;
Thy rod and staff, they cheer me.

282. The Institution of the Sacrament of the Altar.

Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. *Ps. 103, 2.*

The Sacrament of the Altar is the true body and blood of our Lord Jesus Christ, under the bread and wine, for us Christians to eat and to drink, instituted by Christ Himself. The Lord's Supper is no human ordinance or invention. It was not instituted by men, but by our Lord Jesus Himself.

Christ Jesus, the Author of the Holy Supper, is true man and true God: true man, that He might be capable of giving us His body and blood in the Holy Supper; true God, that He might be able to fulfil His great promise and word: "This is My body; this is My blood." Jesus Christ, the Author of the Holy Supper, is also infinitely true and powerful, which consideration ought to move us to value this Sacrament very highly. To show the great importance of this institution, the Holy Ghost has seen fit to record this Sacrament of our blessed Lord four times. And did not the Lord vouchsafe to Paul a special revelation of this doctrine? Does not that also show how important this doctrine is?

Now, then, what does Scripture say regarding the Lord's Supper? It says: "Our Lord Jesus Christ, the same night in which He was betrayed, took bread; and when He had given thanks, He brake it and gave it to His disciples and said, Take, eat; this is My body, which is given for you. This do in remembrance of Me. After the same manner also He took the cup when He had supped, gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Take, drink ye all of it; this cup is the new testament in My blood, which is shed for you for the remission of sins. This do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me." In that solemn night, a few hours before His suffering and death for the sins of the world, the Savior instituted this Sacrament as a rich legacy to His disciples and all Christians. It was His last will. "This do in remembrance of Me." For whom is this Sacrament? "For us Christians to eat and to drink." He gave His holy Supper for His Christians, for every believer until the end of time.

Prayer.

Dearest Jesus, it was the night in which Thou wast betrayed. Yet, although the traitor's plans were all worked out and were all discovered to Thy all-knowing eye, Thy love for sinners was so great that Thou didst institute the Holy Supper. In these hours, the evening before Thy death, Thou hast made Thy testament. In it Thou hast willed to Thy disciples unto the end of time the choicest treasures of heaven and earth. Thus Thou hast declared and sealed and forever established the fact that Thou art faithful, even though all the world turn traitor unto Thee. We heartily thank Thee that Thou hast given this heavenly food. Amen.

Hail, sacred feast, which Jesus makes,
Rich banquet of His flesh and blood!
Thrice happy he who here partakes
That sacred stream, that heavenly food!

283. What Christ Gives Us in the Holy Supper.

Take, eat; this is My body. This cup is the new testament in My blood. *1 Cor. 11, 24. 25.*

When our Lord Jesus instituted the Holy Supper, He took bread, and when He had given thanks, He brake it and said, Take, eat; this is My body. Then He took the cup, saying, This cup is the new testament in My blood. After the ordinary meal the Lord took bread and gave thanks, thus separating it from the ordinary use, and said: "Take, eat; this is My body," indicating that something more exalted than ordinary bread was given to them; and likewise with the cup containing wine. It is plain that two objects are here spoken of as being present. One is the body and blood of Christ; the other, bread and wine. The body and blood are the invisible, divine elements, while the bread and wine are the visible, earthly elements. The relation of the two elements is that the earthly is the means of the heavenly, that is, by using or appropriating this bread and this wine, the body and blood of Christ are received by the communicant. While we eat the bread in the Holy Supper, we at the same time eat the true body of the Lord; and while we drink the wine, we at the same time drink the true blood of the Lord. In, with, and under the bread and wine in the Sacrament the true body and blood of Christ are received, and they are received by all who partake of the Sacrament. It is only by accepting the real presence of Christ in the Sacrament that we can find any real meaning in St. Paul's words: "Whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord." What does that mean if it does not mean that Christ's body and blood are really present in the Sacrament?

It is truly a wonderful gift that Christ gives us in this Sacrament, the best there is on earth and in heaven — Himself, His body and blood, with all the grace He has merited for us. When you receive the very body and blood given into death for you, Christ tells you that you, you also, are redeemed and have God's forgiveness as sure as you see the bread and wine in this blessed Sacrament.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, true God and man, we thank Thee that at Thy table, under the bread and wine, Thou givest us to eat and to drink Thy true body and blood for a comforting remembrance of Thy death; and we beseech Thee: As often as we eat of this bread and drink of this cup, do Thou by Thy holy body, which was given into death for us, and by Thy precious blood, which was shed for us, deliver us from all our sins and strengthen then our faith and grant us strength to lead a new life that we may ever do Thy will here in time and hereafter may not be separated from Thee, but be with Thee and praise Thee in all eternity. Amen.

My God, is now Thy table spread?
And does Thy cup with love o'erflow?
Thither be all Thy children led
And let them all its sweetness know.

284. The Words "This Is My Body," "This Is My Blood," Must Not be Taken in a Figurative Sense.

Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth or addeth thereto. *Gal. 3, 15.*

Christ says: "This is My body." Does that mean: "This signifies My body"? We maintain that the word *is,* according to the plain, natural understanding, does not mean "signifies" or "represents" in any language of the civilized world; but *is* shows that something really exists. *Body* means a true essential body, not an unreal, apparent, body; and in order to remove all doubt, the Lord says: "*My* body." That does away with all figurative language, and to cut off all subterfuges, the Lord adds: "This is My body, *which is broken for you.*" If any words in human speech are plain, these are. Christ spoke these words. They are the very words of the institution of a divine ordinance, words of a divine testament. We do not believe that in this will, or testament, Christ used His words figuratively and left them hopelessly ambiguous, but that He made a plain testament and that He would have His words understood as they stand. As no man disannuls a man's covenant by adding to it or by subtracting from it, so, too, and much more, it behooves us to respect the words of the divine Testator, who gave us this Sacrament.

"This is My body," Luther wrote on the table before him at Marburg, where he discussed with Zwingli the doctrine of the Real Presence. His reasoning power was as strong as Zwingli's, and his reason suggested as many doubts to him about the Real Presence as it did to Zwingli; but the words were in the Bible, he could not take them out, and he would not ignore them; the text was too powerful. And it is just as powerful to-day as it was then. Therefore we, too, must reject the false doctrine of the Reformed Church which takes the words of Christ in a figurative sense, so as to make them read, This bread represents, signifies

My body; and this wine represents My blood. We affirm that no man, no, not even an angel, has authority to change any word of Christ's testament. We must therefore take the words of institution in their proper meaning.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, true God and true man, who, the same night in which Thou wast betrayed, didst institute Thy Holy Supper for a memorial of Thy suffering and death, we pray Thee give us grateful hearts evermore to praise Thy goodness; but enable us also to understand aright the intent and meaning of this Thy will and testament, that we may neither add to it nor subtract from it. Let us accept the words of institution as they are written. Let us firmly believe that in this Sacrament Thou art Thyself really and certainly present and with the outward means we receive Thy true body and blood. Amen.

Help us sincerely to believe
That we Thy mercy do receive
And in Thy grace do find our rest.
Amen. He who believes is blest.

285. Papacy's False Doctrine of the Lord's Supper.

Drink ye all of it. *Matt. 26, 27.*

It is a sad fact that the words of institution have been greatly corrupted. The worst was the perversion of the Lord's Supper into the so-called Mass. The priests claim that in the Mass they *change* bread and wine into the substance of Christ's body and blood. When this change is made, Christ's body and blood are offered up as an unbloody sacrifice for the sins of the living and the dead. This connects the Mass with purgatory and the pocketbooks of the faithful. The faithful on earth are incessantly reminded of their alleged duty to help the souls in purgatory by having masses said for them. But such sacrifices are just as wrong as they are unnecessary. "For by one offering Christ hath perfected forever them that are sanctified. Now, where remission of sins is, there is no more offering for sin." Heb. 10, 14. 18.

The Lord does not say: "This is My *changed* body," as though the bread were changed into the body of Christ, which is that shameful Roman Catholic perversion of the Gospel upon which they have built that horrible doctrine of the Mass, upon which, again, the whole papal system rests. Christ further says by mouth of His apostle: "As often as ye eat of this *bread* and drink of this *cup";* again: "Whosoever shall eat of this *bread* and drink of this *cup."* Speaking of the elements after consecration He still calls them "this bread" and "this cup." Hence there is no change of the elements. The bread remains bread, and the wine remains wine; and in, with, and under the bread and wine we receive the body and blood of Christ.

We also reject that wicked doctrine of the Roman Church which denies the cup to its lay members. Christ Jesus, who instituted the holy Sacrament, particularly said with regard to the cup, "Drink ye *all* of it." And St. Mark expressly states that they *"all* drank of it." The Romanists say that the apostles drank as apostles and not as laymen. But the words of St. Paul: "As often as ye eat this bread *and drink this cup,* are addressed to all members of the local congregation. The priests mutilate the Lord's Supper by not giving the people the wine, contrary to Christ's command.

Prayer.

Dear Savior, the pledge of Thy undying love has become the occasion of a betrayal fouler than that of Judas, and — to our shame we must confess — even some former members of our own dear Lutheran Church have yielded to the temptation. Oh, grant *us* grace to remain true! Let us forever esteem Thy holy Sacrament as one of our greatest treasures, make proper use of it, and by partaking of it be preserved in unwavering fidelity to Thee and to Thy truth. Amen.

How sad the sight, how bad the plight,
When God's Word is neglected,
And Christians all, both great and small,
Are taught e'en to reject it,
To hear instead what man hath said,
And Popes and priests to follow,
Who lead them on, and down and down
To works and worship hollow.

286. The True Lutheran, Biblical Doctrine of the Holy Supper.

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? *1 Cor. 10, 16.*

The Lutheran doctrine of the Lord's Supper is true because the Bible, God's Word, so teaches. That settles the matter. God speaks; we are to hear and believe. That is the attitude of the Lutheran Church towards the Bible and hence also to the teaching of this doctrine. Assuming this attitude, the doctrine as such is not difficult of comprehension. It is very simple. We only collect all the passages of Holy Writ treating of this matter and record the facts, "So says the Lord." True, we find mysteries here, but — "so says the Lord." If there were no mysteries in the Scriptures, we should need no Bible, for then our mind would be just as great as that of God. No, we follow the apostle and take reason captive to the obedience of Christ, knowing that by adhering to His Word we are, as He Himself says, His disciples indeed.

Now, then, what does Scripture say regarding the Lord's Supper? It says that in, with, and under the bread, Christ Jesus gives us that true and natural human body which was received into the person of the Son of God and which was given into suffering and death on the cross for our atonement. Scripture says that in, with, and under the wine Christ gives us that true and natural blood which was shed upon the cross for the remission of our sins.

What manner of eating and drinking, then, takes place in the Holy Supper? Not only natural nor only spiritual, but *sacramental eating and drinking;* that is, the earthly elements, bread and wine, as well as the heavenly gifts, Christ's body and blood, are at the same time taken with the mouth of the body. In what manner are they taken? Bread and wine are taken in a natural manner and Christ's body and blood in a supernatural manner.

This Lutheran, Biblical doctrine is very plain and clear. We take the words of the dying Son of God in their original sense, literally, just as they read.

Prayer.

O Lord God, Thou hast instituted Holy Baptism and the Sacrament of the true body and blood of Thy dear Son; to these Sacraments Christ has bound us, and therein He has revealed Himself to us. If in these Sacraments we lay hold on Christ, we surely have Him. All other things not enjoined on us we should dispense with, otherwise we would far miss the mark. Lord God, render me well prepared, so that Thy true body and blood, a priceless nourishment, may refresh my soul at this heavenly feast of love and joy. Array Thou me in the vestures of salvation and in the garment of the righteousness of true faith. Amen.

Abide with heavenly brightness
Among us, precious Light;
Thy truth direct, and keep us
From error's gloomy night.

287. Why This Sacrament Should be Administered to the End of Days.

As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come. *1 Cor. 11, 26.*

What does Christ, our Lord, enjoin when He says: "This do in remembrance of Me"? That this Sacrament should be administered in His Church to the end of days, that under the consecrated bread and wine His body be eaten and His blood be drunk. And for this reason we continue to perform the sacred act, as without our eating and drinking the Sacrament does not exist. We celebrate the Holy Supper as a memorial act, whereby we praise Christ for what He has done for us. It is an act of thanksgiving.

What looms large in our sacramental thanksgiving, however, is not the act we do, but what *God* has done and does. We give, but we receive far more; God gives as He always gives, or we could have nothing to give. The sacramental act, then, is not anything we do and offer to God to merit His grace, but an act in which we receive His grace. Does not the apostle say: "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come"? What, then, ought we to do when we eat His body and drink His blood and thus receive the pledge? We ought to show and remember His death and the shedding of His blood, as He taught us: "This do, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of Me."

That implies the main purpose for which the Lord instituted this Sacrament. Which is that purpose? As the evangelists plainly say: "For the remission of sins." Why, then, ought we to remember and show forth the Lord's death? That we may learn to believe that no creature could make satisfaction for our sins but Christ, true God and man, and that we may learn to look with terror at our sins and to regard them as great indeed and to find joy and comfort in Him alone; and thus be saved through such faith.

Why, then, should the Sacrament be administered until the second coming of Christ? That we may learn to believe more firmly that Christ died for us out of great love and that we may also the better learn to love God and our neighbor.

Prayer.

O Lord God, who hast left unto us in a wonderful Sacrament a memorial of Thy holy Passion, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may so use this Sacrament of Thy body and blood that the fruits of Thy redemption will continually be manifest in us. Thou, O Lord Jesus Christ, hast said when instituting this Sacrament: "This do in remembrance of Me." It is Thy holy will, then, that this Sacrament should forever be administered in Thy Church. It is Thy call and divine decree that under the consecrated bread and wine we should eat Thy body and drink Thy blood till Thou comest for our final redemption. Amen.

O Lord, we will obey Thy call,
We bow to Thy decree,
And through Thy love thus draw us all,
Dear Savior, unto Thee!

288. The Benefit of the Lord's Supper.

This is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. *Matt. 26, 28.*

In the first place, by a worthy communion we receive *forgiveness of sins and the assurance thereof.* God, rich in love, has provided not only one, but several means of rendering poor sinners certain of the forgiveness of their sins. These means are the preaching of the Gospel, Holy Baptism, Absolution, and Holy Communion. We ought to thank Him for the rich provision He has made for the strengthening of our faith. Whoever knows from personal experience how hard it is for one who sorely feels the burden of sin to believe that his sins are forgiven, will realize the greatness of God's grace and loving care in giving us not merely one means of becoming assured of the forgiveness of sin.

Every one who partakes of the holy Sacrament receives the very body and blood which Christ gave as a ransom to purchase forgiveness for us. In this Sacrament He gives us this body and blood of His as a pledge and assurance of the forgiveness of sins, saying, as it were, to every penitent sinner: As surely as with your mouth you eat My body and drink My blood, so surely your sins are forgiven; for I gave this My body and this My blood for your sins. As surely, therefore, as you believe that you partake of your Lord's body, given into death for the remission of your sins, and of your Lord's blood, shed for the remission of your sins, just so surely you must believe that you have forgiveness of sins.

And where there is forgiveness of sins, *there is also life and salvation.* As sin is spiritual death, so forgiveness of sins is the birth of spiritual life, the life in and with God, life in holiness and righteousness. This Sacrament strengthens the spiritual life. As the body needs nourishment, so does the soul. The Lord's Supper is a means of grace which imparts forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation. Is this not a great benefit of this blessed institution of our dear Lord?

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, may the forgiveness purchased by Thy innocent death be imparted and sealed unto us anew as often as we partake of Thy blessed Supper. May we evermore be strengthened by it in faith toward Thee, in patience and hope, in fervent love toward one another, unto all holy obedience in newness of life. And may Thy Sacrament ever be to us an earnest and pledge of our final redemption, that we may praise Thee here in time and hereafter in eternity,— Thou, whose mercy endureth forever. Amen.

Sun, who all my life doth brighten,
Light, who dost my soul enlighten,
Joy, the sweetest man e'er knoweth,
Fount, whence all my being floweth,—
At Thy feet I cry, my Maker,
Let me be a fit partaker
Of this blessed food from heaven,
For our good, Thy glory, given.

289. For What Purpose, Then, Do We Approach the Lord's Table?

Who shall also confirm you unto the end that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. *1 Cor. 1, 8.*

The day on which we go to Communion is a day of spiritual refreshment for our weary souls. We then enter, as it were, a cloud which hides the world and its vanity from view that in communion with Christ we may learn how best to resist the temptations which daily waylay us from birth to death. If we come to this Sacrament, saying with the publican, "God be merciful to me, a sinner," and go away justified and comforted, our joy over the seal of forgiveness granted us in the Holy Supper is a sign of the new life within us. And if we feel no joy, if we but believe His Word, our faith is a true indication of our new life, which is nourished at the Lord's Table; for the Holy Supper is rightly regarded as food for the soul, which quickens and refreshes the new man. And thus *our faith is greatly strengthened* by the Bread of Life in Holy Communion.

In the Sacrament we have had the most intimate communion with Christ and are again assured that He is with us always and that hereafter we shall see Him face to face and in His presence have fulness of joy and pleasures forevermore; and we leave the Communion altar with the resolve to bear our burdens with Christian patience and to trust firmly in our Savior's love, knowing that it is but a little while when we shall see Him in whom we believed here and He shall wipe away all tears from our eyes. This glorious *hope becomes unwavering,* while our faith is strengthened in the Sacrament. Thus faith becomes bold and brave to face all trials and hardships of this life unflinchingly.

When partaking of the Lord's Supper we are particularly to remember His suffering and death, and we ought to make the earnest resolve never again to be ashamed of Him, never again to deny Him who gave His body and blood for us, but *to bear witness of Him boldly* and to confess His name before the world.

Prayer.

O grant, my dear Redeemer and Savior, that by means of this blessed food and drink my faith may be strengthened more and more, that I may enter into ever closer communion with Thee, gain strength for leading a godly life, and be ever more assured of the eternal life of joy in heaven, — all for the sake of Thy holy merits. Let me be ever thankful for all Thy goodness and mercy. When in the Holy Supper I have received the heavenly gift, let me go to my home with thanksgiving and with the resolve to be no more guilty of ingratitude. Let me offer up praise and thanks to Thee continually. Amen.

We are rich, for He was poor;
Is not this a wonder?
Therefore praise God evermore
Here on earth and yonder!

290. Why Should We Frequently Partake of This Sacrament?

This do in remembrance of Me. *Luke 22, 19.*

What should incite us to receive the Sacrament frequently? With respect to God both the command and the promise of Christ, our Lord, should move us; with respect to ourselves, the trouble that lies heavily upon us, on account of which such command, encouragement, and promise are given. The early Christians celebrated Communion at every service, because the Lord said: "This do." The disciples knew that the Sacrament thus instituted was to be observed to the Last Day; for St. Paul says: "As often as ye eat this bread and drink this cup, ye do show the Lord's death till He come." "This do" was not spoken to Christ's disciples at Jerusalem only, but to Christians in all ages. Christ gave His Holy Supper for every believer until the end of time, when He will appear in heavenly glory and majesty.

In this respect, however, very many fail. What disagreeable task is it not considered by many to go to Communion! How often do they not put it off without a valid reason! Every Christian ought to remember that Christ gave us this Sacrament to use it, and that it is indeed a most precious means of grace. That would induce him to partake of it frequently for the strengthening of his faith. In his preface to the Small Catechism Luther says: "If a person does not seek or desire the Lord's Supper at least some four times a year, it is to be feared that he despises the Sacrament and is not a Christian." Weighed in this balance, what shall we say of our Communion table? How many times a year do you go to the Lord's Supper? Do you partake of it *often?* It will not do to say: I can be just as good a Christian if I do not commune often; for there is the Lord's command, "This do." Therefore you should use the Sacrament frequently. A Christian must consider it both his duty and a privilege to use it.

Nothing ought to keep us away from the Lord's Table. We should be prompted by Christ's command and promise and by the trouble that lies heavily upon us to appear there frequently. Let us ever cherish the Holy Supper as a treasure of inestimably greater value than anything this world can offer us.

Prayer.

O dearest Jesus, in the Holy Supper Thou didst establish a memorial of Thy wonderful gifts. This Sacrament shall therefore ever be to me a memorial of Thy love and mercy. As oft as I shall eat of this bread and drink of this cup, I will proclaim Thy death and tell in thankful strains what Thou hast done for me. He who but seldom appears at this Table thereby proves that he does not value Thy institution very highly. But he who receives this Supper often and in true faith shows that he cherishes it as a great treasure. O my dearest Redeemer, let me ever be found in the number of these! Amen.

Oh, let Thy Table honored be
And furnished well with joyful guests;
And may each soul salvation see
That here its sacred pledges tastes.

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291. Especially Those who Have a Weak Faith Should Go to the Lord's Supper.

A bruised reed shall He not break, and the smoking flax shall He not quench. *Is. 42, 3.*

There are many weak Christians in the Church to-day. Their knowledge and understanding of divine things is very limited; they are hardly able to tell the simplest things of Christian teaching. Their knowledge of the Bible is very limited, and they are full of doubts, unable to see in many cases what is right or wrong.

Weakness of faith is a dangerous thing. Do not those who have a weak faith easily fall a prey to error, to temptation, to sins and lusts? Let us all, therefore, seek to have a strong faith! Let us pray with the disciples, "Lord, increase our faith." And to increase our faith, we must diligently make use of the means of grace. Come to the house of God and with devout attention hear the preaching of God's Word. Come to the holy Sacrament and receive the true body and blood of Christ, given and shed for the remission of sins.

But are not those of weak faith to be classed with unworthy communicants? By no means; for such as have but a weak faith and are frequently overtaken in a fault, but who keenly feel their weakness and yearn to become stronger, on the contrary, are very welcome guests at Christ's Table. The Lord will in no wise cast them out; He rather invites them to come, inasmuch as He instituted His Holy Supper especially for the weak and the frail, that they might be strengthened through this spiritual food. To them He says: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." When faith is like a smoking flax, when the smoke is thick and the light weak, that faith is also pleasing to God and an object of His special care. To strengthen this weak faith, the Lord has instituted His Holy Supper. Here He says to you: As surely as I here give you My body and blood to eat and to drink, so surely you shall believe that I have died for you, for the remission of your sins, your sins individually. Therefore do not feel sad. Your very desire to believe is a sign that you have not lost the faith.

Prayer.

Dear Lord God, Thou knowest I do not presume to come before Thee of mine own self or relying on my own worthiness; for, when looking to this, I dare not raise mine eyes to Thee, nor would I know how to begin my prayer. But I come because of Thy most earnest desire and command that we should call upon Thee, and because Thou hast promised to hear us. Thou hast said: "Come unto Me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." This I believe, and therefore I often partake of Thy Holy Supper which Thou hast prepared for me to strengthen my weak faith. Amen.

Lord, show us still that Thou art good
And grant us evermore this food.
Give faith to every wav'ring soul
And make each wounded spirit whole.

292. The Power of the Lord's Supper.

He [Jesus] gave it to the disciples and said, Take, eat. Drink ye all of it. *Matt. 26, 26. 27.*

How can bodily eating and drinking do such great things? It is not the eating and drinking, indeed, that does them, but the words here written, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins"; which words, beside the bodily eating and drinking, are as the chief thing in the Sacrament; and he that believes these words has what they say and express, namely, the forgiveness of sins. Here Luther, speaking of the power that does the great things in the Lord's Supper, says: It is not the eating and drinking that does it. We cannot eat and drink away the guilt of sin.

Indeed, there is Christ's command: "Take, eat, drink," but the virtue of the Sacrament is not in the act of eating and drinking; the "great things" in the Sacrament are not done by it. What, then, does these great things? The word of God is the chief thing in the Sacrament. It is by virtue of the word of God that our faith is strengthened when we receive the Holy Supper, the words of institution spoken by Christ when He ordained this Sacrament, which are repeated by us when we consecrate the bread and wine. "This do," said Christ; that was the command the Church received to celebrate His holy Supper. "This is My body and blood, given and shed for you for the remission of sins," said Christ; that was His promise that, wherever His command will be followed, He will give His body and blood and with it all His merits and benefits. He is faithful and therefore keeps His promise. The words Christ spoke are the words of the testament which He made in the night in which He was betrayed, and He confirmed them by His death and so made them unchangeable. These words are spirit and life, the power of God unto salvation. By virtue of these words He is in the midst of us, who are gathered together in His name, giving us His body to eat, His blood to drink, and all His merits to hold and possess. He Himself, with all the riches of His grace, is in this Sacrament for each and every communicant.

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus Christ, it is not the mere eating and drinking that does such great things, but Thy gracious promise: "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." Grant that we may not by self-righteousness, unbelief, or other wickedness forfeit these great things of Thy Sacrament, but with firm faith in Thy merits obtain the remission of our sins. Since without Thee we can do nothing, we beseech Thee to enable us also by Thy omnipotent grace to serve Thee in newness of life. Amen.

No care, nor effort either,
Is needed day and night,
How ye may draw Him hither
In your own strength and might.

He comes, He comes, with gladness,
Moved by His love alone,
To calm your fear and sadness,
Which unto Him are known.

293. The Salutary Use of the Sacrament.

Examine yourselves whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. *2 Cor. 13, 5.*

"Who receives such Sacrament worthily?" This is a most important question both for the communicant and for the Church. We all should know the right answer in order that we may all partake worthily of the Holy Supper of our Lord. May it, therefore, be our daily concern to make sure at all times that we are using the Sacrament in a salutary manner.

Who, then, receives such Sacrament worthily? Luther says: "Fasting and bodily preparation is, indeed, a fine outward training; but he is truly worthy and well prepared who has faith in these words, 'Given and shed for you for the remission of sins.'" Fasting, in Luther's day, was a universal custom. "Bodily preparation" is the care bestowed upon the body; we are to appear at the Lord's Table clean and with appropriate clothing and to approach it with modest demeanor. This is a fine and praiseworthy custom. Nevertheless, it touches only the body, not the soul. It is but something outward; even an unbeliever is able to do it. In itself these mere outward things profit nothing to render us worthy. True worthiness at the Lord's Table is not an outward, but an inner worthiness. Neither is it a worthiness according to the Law, but according to the Gospel. It does not consist in absolute freedom from sin and perfection of life, but rather in fully realizing our unworthiness and sinfulness, in having a contrite heart that is spiritually pure, in earnestly desiring the forgiveness of sins, also taking comfort in this forgiveness.

In short, what makes the Christian fit to receive the blessings of the Lord's Supper is not any fitness of his own, but his *faith* in Him who has atoned for his unworthiness, his sinfulness, before God. The blessing of Communion is the forgiveness of sin. This blessing can be received only by faith. Jesus forgave a certain woman, a very sinful woman, saying to her, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace." Faith makes a worthy communicant. True worthiness consists only and solely in this, that the communicant believe in these words: "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." *Nothing but faith can make a communicant worthy.* We must have faith which trusts in the word "For you."

Prayer.

Almighty and eternal God, who hast commanded us to celebrate the Sacrament of the body and blood of Thy dear Son in remembrance of His suffering and death, grant, we beseech Thee, that we may ever receive Thy Sacrament worthily. Works of our own righteousness can never make us worthy before Thee. We must have faith, which trusts in the word of promise, firm confidence, which accepts the benefits of the Sacrament, the fruits of Thy Son's redemption, and appropriates them as its own, and the assurance that we are acceptable with Thee. Lord, give us this faith, which alone makes us truly worthy and well prepared, and we shall praise Thee forever. Amen.

May God be praised henceforth and blest forever,
Who, Himself both Gift and Giver,
With His own flesh and blood our souls doth nourish;
May they grow thereby and flourish!

294. Who Is Unworthy to Approach the Lord's Table?

He that eateth and drinketh unworthily eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. *1 Cor. 11, 29.*

Who is unworthy and unprepared to receive the benefits of the Holy Supper? He who does not believe, or doubts, the words, "Given and shed for you for the remission of sins." For the words, "For you," require all hearts to believe. We must approach the mercy-seat. Our anchor must be grounded in the Rock of Ages, our faith must stand on Christ, the Corner-stone. Faith makes a communicant worthy. But unbelief renders him unworthy.

How do *you* go to Holy Communion? This question each communicant should put to himself before he approaches the Table of the Lord. There are not a few who go to the Lord's Supper either quite thoughtlessly and stupidly or with a wrong intention.

Some go from mere force of habit; others, because they are admonished by their parents; others, because they consider it a meritorious deed; still others, because they wish to acquire or retain before men the name of pious Christians. It need not be wondered at that such communicants derive no blessing from the Holy Supper, but grow worse as time goes on. How do *you* go to Communion? Do you approach the Lord's Table in the spirit of self-righteousness like the Pharisee, who prayed with himself, "Lord, I thank Thee that I am not as other men are"? Do you fancy you need no forgiveness of sins? Or do you wholly despair of obtaining forgiveness of sins? God's Word assures you that you receive it in the Holy Supper. Therefore do not give way to these thoughts of despair. Every truly penitent sinner receives forgiveness. Only unbelief can make a communicant unworthy.

There is another class of unworthy communicants; it consists of those who persist in their wicked purpose, who would rather continue to serve sin than their God and Savior, or who are at enmity with their neighbors and do not want to be reconciled to them. If you are not willing to be reconciled with a brother that has aught against you, if you are not willing to give up cursing, or some other sin to which you are addicted, then you ought to remain away from the Lord's Table. Unworthy communicants receive the body and blood of Christ in the Holy Supper, but they receive it to their greater damnation.

Prayer.

O holy God, Thou knowest the unworthiness of all our works, and therefore we beseech Thee, work in us by Thy Holy Spirit what we of ourselves are unable to achieve. Give us grace to appear before Thee, not only with outward reverence, but with true repentance for our sins, with firm faith in Thy mercy, and with the earnest purpose to amend our sinful lives. Eradicate the root of all bitterness and animosity from our hearts and fill our souls with love and compassion toward all men. Above all, help us not to absent ourselves from Thy Table, but forthwith to come to a penitent knowledge of our sins and to long for the forgiveness which Thou offerest and sealest to us in the Sacrament of Thy Son. Amen.

Why are its blessings all in vain
Before unwilling hearts displayed?
Was not for us the Victim slain?
Are we forbid the children's bread?

295. Self-Examination Necessary Before Partaking of Holy Communion.

Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup. *1 Cor. 11, 28.*

To make certain that he is worthy to make a salutary use of the Lord's Supper, a Christian heeds the admonition of Paul: "Let a man examine himself." He should examine first *whether he truly repents of his sins.* "To examine oneself," says Luther, "means to consider well in what condition we are. If we find that our hearts are hardened, that we are not willing to refrain from sin, then we should not go to the Holy Sacrament; for then we are no Christians. The best thing we could and should do under such circumstances is to cease from such wickedness, to repent, to trust faithfully in the promise and mercy of God, and to unite again with Christians in the participation of the Lord's Supper." Whosoever comes to the Lord's Table as a poor sinner does not only prove that he cherishes the Lord's Supper as a treasure of priceless value, but he is worthy and well prepared; he will receive Christ's body and blood worthily, unto his soul's salvation.

The Christian, secondly, examines himself *whether he believes in Jesus Christ.* He should examine himself whether he truly believes that Christ's body was given and His blood was shed for the remission of His sins. Christ so loved you that He gave His life for you. God gives His Word and Sacrament to save you. With this trust the Christian turns from his sins and says: "God be merciful to me, a sinner!" He knows that he is accepted, that he is worthy for Jesus' sake.

The Christian, finally, examines himself *whether he has the good and earnest purpose with the aid of God the Holy Ghost henceforth to amend his sinful life.* When you come from the Lord's Table with your faith strengthened, let it bring forth love, love to God, with the resolve no more to offend Him by transgressing His commandments; and love to men, with the resolve to show charity to all.

Prayer.

My Savior, let me find grace in Thine eyes. How could I, being of unclean lips, yea, vile and base, be counted worthy unless Thou make me worthy? Therefore prepare me by Thy grace for a worthy reception of Thy Holy Supper. Thou hast said: "Him that cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out." Therefore take my soul into Thy keeping according to Thy great compassion. Remember, O Lord Jesus, that I am inclined to all that is evil and that of my own powers I cannot do anything that is pleasing to Thee. Help me for Thy mercy's sake. Amen.

Then come before His presence now
And banish fear and sadness;
To your Redeemer pay your vow
And sing with joy and gladness:
Though great distress my soul befell,
The Lord, my God, did all things well.
To God all praise and glory!

296. The Church's Duty to Insure a Worthy Reception of the Sacrament.

Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine. *Matt. 7, 6.*

To the hearing of the Word all men are invited, but not so to the Sacrament of the Altar. This Sacrament is a special privilege of those who attend it in true faith, the real members of Christ's true Church. God has entrusted the means of grace, His Word and Sacraments, to His Church. The Church, therefore, as a steward of God's mysteries, is to see to it that, so far as men can tell, only worthy communicants are admitted to the Lord's Table.

The Church should deny the Lord's Supper to all such as are known to be ungodly and impenitent, since they would eat and drink damnation to themselves. It is impossible to be a Christian and at the same time to live with the evil purpose of sinning again. No matter what the sin, if committed knowingly and without any intention of quitting it, it will destroy spiritual life within a Christian. Penitence and faith do not accord with an evil purpose.

The Church should deny the Lord's Supper also *to those of a false faith,* since it is a token and testimony of the unity of faith. There can be no real unity of the Spirit and of faith with those who deny the doctrines of our faith. The rule Titus 3, 10 must stand: "A man that is an heretic, after the first and second admonition reject." By admitting such to Holy Communion with us, we would disobey the command of God and sanction a false belief. Such must not commune with us, as a worthy communicant in the Lutheran Church must fully and truly confess the Lutheran, that is, Biblical, doctrines.

The Church should deny the Lord's Supper also *to such as have given offense and have not yet made amends.* We should be ready to forgive. First be reconciled to thy brother and then come and offer thy gift.

Finally, the Church should deny the Lord's Supper *to all such as are not able to examine themselves;* for God's Word says: "Let a man examine himself and so let him eat of that bread and drink of that cup."

Prayer.

Dearest Redeemer, I am indeed not worthy that Thou shouldst come under my roof; but let Thy grace, able to do all things, render me worthy that I may not be found among the guests without wedding-garments, but be a worthy guest at Thy Table and partake of all the treasures of grace Thou hast provided. May Thy grace, O Lord Jesus, be and remain with me, even as my hope is continually in Thee! Let me always be well prepared when I approach Thy Table, so that Thy true body and blood, that priceless nourishment of the soul, may refresh my soul in this heavenly feast of love and joy. Array Thou me, I beseech Thee, in the vestures of salvation. Amen.

Lord Jesus Christ, to us attend,
Thy Holy Spirit to us send,
With grace to rule us day by day
And lead us in true wisdom's way.

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297. Be Not Yoked Together with Unbelievers.

Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. *Ps. 1, 1.*

Notice the gradation: "ungodly," "sinners," "scornful." These terms denote the unbelievers according to the more or less pronounced way in which they manifest their disregard for Christ. Not all unbelievers are alike. There are those who live virtuous lives and have a good reputation among their fellow-men, but are not concerned about their soul's salvation. They are indifferent and careless. These we might call the *ungodly.* The *sinners* are those who openly serve sin in one form or another, who do not regard the principles of right and justice. Others, again, ridicule religion and pour contempt and scorn on all that is sacred to God's children. These are the *scornful,* men whose consciences are seared.

Now, what should be the Christian's attitude toward these three classes of unbelievers? He should not walk, stand, or sit in their company; on the contrary, He should shun it. He should avoid intercourse with these enemies of God and our Savior. He who associates with such as are spiritually careless will imbibe their carelessness; he who is on friendly terms with lewd and dissolute people takes his life into his hands and does not value his peace with God. No Christian has the right to be seen at public amusement halls and theaters; no Christian can lay aside his modesty so as to tread the floors of a dance-hall. These are the places where souls are entrapped, where Satan, the fiendish fowler, lays his snares. These places have contributed most to immorality in general and to other sins which so frightfully and hideously prevail. Keep aloof from them. You have no promise that God will protect you if you expose yourself to temptation. Keep aloof also from houses of worship where ostensibly God is honored, but the Bible is impeached. Flee the atheist's and infidel's venomous utterances. It is easier to take poison than to get rid of it.

Prayer.

Since Thou, O dearest Jesus, didst so powerfully deliver us from the kingdom of darkness and didst so mercifully receive us into Thy Kingdom of Grace, let us also be and remain blessed citizens of Thy Kingdom of Glory in heaven and heirs of everlasting bliss and joy, in those blessed mansions where we shall justly laud and praise Thee with thankful hearts and tongues. And may we in this life thank Thee for Thy grace and goodness as long as we have our breath. Amen.

Therefore, Jesus, my Salvation,
Thou my One, my All, shalt be.
Prove my fixed determination,
Root out all hypocrisy;
Look well if on sin's slippery paths I am hasting
And lead me, O Lord, in the way everlasting!
This one thing is needful, all others are vain;
I count all but lost that I Christ may obtain.

298. Behold the Holiness of God!

Holy, holy, holy, is the Lord of hosts; the whole earth is full of His glory. *Is. 6, 3.*

No evil ever proceeded from God. Rather could darkness proceed from the sun than evil from the holy God. Behold the bright luminaries in the skies: the sun, the moon, and the starry host. How dazzling is their luster! How radiant is their splendor! But what is the luster and splendor of these heavenly bodies compared with the light in which God dwells forever!

Now, if God is holy and holiness itself, then each and every sin and transgression must be an abomination before Him; as we read in the 5th Psalm: "Thou art not a God that hath pleasure in wickedness; neither shall evil dwell with Thee." He Himself says: "Ye shall be holy; for I, the Lord, your God, am holy." And again: "Be ye therefore perfect even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect." This is the law which the holy God has made for us and to which He bound us. And we are bound to it. He surely has the right to give us commandments. He is the one Lawgiver. Should we not submit to His holy will? Should we not love Him and willingly do according to His commandments? Yes, we must lead a godly life after by faith we became His children and He our heavenly Father. It must not be said of us: "Thou that makest thy boast of the Law, through breaking the Law dishonorest thou God. For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you." Of us, who are the children of light, it should rather be said: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father which is in heaven." We should not be conformed to the world and be drawn into the world, but make a firm stand for principle, and by our example of a truly Christian life draw as many as we can of the children of this world into our Christian ranks. This is our duty as the children of light whose Father is the God of holiness.

Prayer.

O Thou Holy God, govern, I beseech Thee, with Thy Holy Spirit, my heart, mind, and thoughts, all my designs and purposes, my words and works, that I may understand what is good or evil and may so live and walk as a child of light in this wicked and perverted world of darkness that, above all things, I will hate sin and have a heartfelt desire for that heavenly home purchased and secured for me by Christ, my Savior, and not forfeit it by a life of sin. Amen.

Until we join the hosts that cry,
"Holy art Thou, O Lord most high!"
And 'mid the light of that blest place
Shall gaze upon Thee face to face.

Glory to God, the Father, Son,
And Holy Spirit, Three in One!
To Thee, O Holy Trinity,
Be praise throughout eternity!

299. Love Not the World.

Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. *1 John 2, 15. 16.*

"Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? Whosoever, therefore, will be a friend of the world, is the enemy of God." According to the Word of God friendship with the world is nothing but gross idolatry. The first species of this idolatry is what St. John terms *the lust of the flesh.* Thousands in low as well as in high stations of life sacrifice to this idol; they seek to achieve happiness by gratifying their sinful lust. They seek happiness in the lust of this world and give their hearts, which belong to God, to Satan and his ally, the world.

The second species of idolatry mentioned by the apostle is *the lust of the eyes.* If we seek our happiness in any of these things, then it becomes an idol. And the enjoyment of it, however it may be admired and applauded by the world, is condemned by God as damnable idolatry.

The third species of idolatry which the apostle speaks of is *the pride of life.* This means the seeking of happiness in the praise of men, in honors bestowed by men instead of seeking one's happiness solely in that which God gives and has promised. And this is the lowest, basest idolatry of which the human soul is capable.

No wonder that Jesus said to His disciples: "Ye are not of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world"; and again: "Ye cannot serve God and mammon"; and again: "What shall it profit a man if he shall gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" And as the Master, so His apostles. St. Paul exhorts: "Be not conformed to this world"; "Come out from among them and be ye separate." St. James writes: "Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, . . . to keep himself unspotted from the world." There is nothing uncertain about these statements. They declare that there is a broad and ineffaceable line between the people of God and the world. They are so far apart that no man can belong to both at the same time. The world proposes a compromise, but it always means spiritual death to the Christian. Oh, therefore, shun the world!

Prayer.

O Father of all grace and mercy, preserve me from bad company and people of loose habits, so that, when the wicked entice, I will not consent nor follow in their ways, but guard my feet from their paths, so that shame and vice may not be my portion. O Lord, Thou hast hitherto reared me as a father does his son; grant me grace to incline mine ears and listen to the words of the wise that I may become prudent and cautious walking through this world and not lose the blessed life to come. Amen.

Don't do as other people do,
Unless you know they're right.
'Tis better far to stand alone
Than with the wrong unite.

This trying to be popular
And mingling with the throng
Has led to ruin many souls
Who yielded to the wrong.

300. "Beware of False Prophets!"

Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing, but inwardly they are ravening wolves. *Matt. 7, 15.*

False prophets generally appear in sheep's clothing, that is to say, in outward appearance they cannot be distinguished from true prophets. The special mark of a false prophet is his false teaching, his erroneous doctrine. The Lord's command is: Preach My Word; proclaim My will! Now, if a preacher deviates from the Word of God, if he either adds something thereto, claiming that God had commanded or forbidden things of which we find nothing in the Bible; or if he takes therefrom, saying that God did not mean this or that which is clearly set forth in the Scriptures; if he distorts the Word of God to make it conform to the dictates of human reason, — he is a false prophet. We must therefore class with the false prophets not only all those who teach rank infidelity, but also all those Christian ministers who do not strictly abide by the divine Word, no matter what Church they represent, even if they style themselves Lutherans. They are false prophets in every point in which they deviate from the revealed truth of God's Word.

It is a dangerous thing to tamper with any of the doctrines of our Christian religion, because one error is sure to bring on others. Nor is it true that errors in minor doctrines count for very little as long as we hold on to the great central truths of the Christian religion. Of course, there is a difference as to the harm done to a man's soul. The central doctrines, such as the doctrine of the deity of Christ and His redemption, of justification by faith without the deeds of the Law, no one can deny without losing his faith. In others it is possible to err without necessarily losing one's faith. It is possible for a man to err in some things and still, with a fortunate inconsistency, to cling to Christ and His redemption. But nevertheless it is a dangerous thing to falsify any doctrine, because every false doctrine, no matter how insignificant it may appear, involves, in the last analysis, a denial of Christ. Every error in doctrine robs God of the honor belonging to Him and bestows it upon man. Thus every false doctrine is a dangerous thing.

Prayer.

Dear Father in heaven, since, alas! I have lived to see the time foretold by Thine own Son in which false Christs would rise and show great signs and wonders, insomuch that, if it were possible, they shall deceive the very elect, I pray Thee that Thou wouldst graciously guard and keep me from error and false doctrine. Preserve me in Thy truth — Thy Word is the truth — that I may adhere to it and steadfastly confess and believe it to my last hour. Because every false doctrine endangers the soul, Thy dear Son has warned me against it when He said, "Beware of false prophets!" Let me heed this warning for the sake of Thy glory and my soul's salvation. Amen.

Take not Thy saving Word away,
My soul's true comfort, staff, and stay;
Abide with me and keep me free
From all false doctrine graciously.

301. Practising Close Communion Is Eminently Charitable.

Whosoever shall eat this bread and drink this cup of the Lord unworthily shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.
1 Cor. 11, 27.

No other Church than our Lutheran Church insists upon strict adherence to the Bible in every respect. With us Lutherans it is the Bible first and last because we believe it to be the Word of God from beginning to end. We admit no one to church-membership who does not accept the Bible as the inspired Word of God and does not know and believe at least the chief doctrines of the Bible. Nor do we permit any one to remain a member of our Lutheran Church who no longer believes the teachings of the Bible or leads an ungodly life. Thus also, if we know any one to be ungodly and impenitent, we must deny him the Sacrament until he repents; for the Lord says: "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast ye your pearls before swine."

We have therefore in our Lutheran Church what people are pleased to term close Communion, that is to say, we permit only those to commune at our altars who confess the right faith and, as far as man can judge, are penitent sinners. Such close Communion, however, is a stumbling-block to many, and numerous objections are raised against it, not only by sectarians, but also by many who call themselves Lutherans. So sensitive have people become these days that when a clear Scriptural presentation of this matter is given, they will stop their ears and, without giving thought or attention, will say: "You are illiberal and uncharitable." But are we not just as liberal as God's plain Word permits us to be? Guided by the Bible, we cannot justify and hold fellowship with societies teaching doctrines contrary to the Bible. Christ never intended that there should be another Church than that which teaches men to observe all the things whatsoever He has commanded His followers. Whoever fails to adhere to the truth of Christ and to the Church of the pure doctrine, does not deserve to be admitted to the Lord's altar. Who will call this care on the part of the Church, this so-called close communion, uncharitable? Shall we suffer the unworthy communicant to become guilty of the body and blood of the Lord, to eat and drink damnation to himself? Does not true charity demand that we warn him?

Prayer.

O Lord, the bread which we break is the communion of Thy body given for us on the cross; and the wine which we drink at the altar is the communion of Thy precious blood, shed for us throughout all Thy painful sufferings. In what manner have we deserved to receive such great proofs of Thy goodness? Who are we that Thou dost draw so nigh to us by uniting with us so closely that Thou art and ever wilt remain in us and we in Thee as members of Thy body? What return can we make to Thee for taking so deep an interest in our souls, giving Thine own self as a pledge of their salvation? Grant us grace, therefore, to show deep gratitude for Thy unbounded love and mercy. Amen.

Abide with richest blessings
Among us, bounteous Lord;
Let us in grace and wisdom
Grow daily through Thy Word.

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302. This Supper Serves to Further Us in Holiness of Life.

What shall I render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward me? *Ps. 116, 12.*

Whatever we are exhorted and admonished to do in our Christian calling, we should do nothing for the sake of gain or reward. Gratitude should prompt us. The mercies of God should induce us to do those things which are required of us. What great mercy has God shown us! Daily He provides for all our bodily needs. And can any language in the world describe His mercy in the great work of our redemption? Has not God's mercy and love been so great that He gave His only-begotten Son, who bled and died on the cross for our sins and gained for us all eternal life? And did He not bestow upon us the treasures of His redemption in Holy Baptism? And then behold that wonderful gift Christ gives us in the Sacrament of the Altar, His body and His blood, the best there is in heaven and earth, Himself, with all the riches of His grace: forgiveness of sin, spiritual life, and eternal salvation. Could He do more to impress upon us all His divine grace and unspeakable love? How can we ever sufficiently thank Him for that? What shall we render unto the Lord for all His benefits toward us? St. John answers: "We love Him because He first loved us." The psalmist answers: "I will run the way of Thy commandments when Thou shalt enlarge my heart." Paul wrote to the Romans: "I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."

Faith creates love. At the Lord's Table our faith has been strengthened, and that also strengthens and increases our love toward God and our neighbor. We come away with the earnest desire to follow Christ in the beauty of holiness, zealous unto good works, that we may be conformed to Him more and more and all our doing and life may please Him. John 14, 15 Jesus says: "If ye love Me, keep My commandments." And He who loves us and demands our love in return also wants us to love our neighbor. St. John says: "And this commandment have we from Him, that he who loveth God love his brother also."

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus, I rejoice in being privileged, because of Thy great goodness, together with my fellow-Christians, to go to Thy house and to partake of Thy body and blood in, with, and under the consecrated bread and wine. Oh, how my soul longeth, yea, even fainteth for the courts of the Lord and His altar! As the hart panteth after the waterbrooks, so panteth my soul after Thee, my Redeemer. For Thou art my Shepherd; I shall not want. O Lord Jesus, even as Thou hast begun the good work in me, a poor wretched sinner, so also mercifully perform it, by the gracious aid of Thy Holy Spirit, unto Thy honor and the welfare of my soul. Amen.

Thou, who feedest us below,
Source of all we have or know,
Grant that with Thy saints above
We may share Thy feast of love!

303. By Partaking of This Sacrament We Confess Our Faith.

For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread. *1 Cor. 10, 17.*

The apostle here speaks of the Lord's Supper. He reminds us that in the Holy Supper one and the same bread and with it one and the same body of Christ are distributed. Therefore it is clear:

we Christians have communion together at the Lord's Table; although we are many, we are but one body and members of one body, because we eat of the same bread and drink of the same cup at the same altar. We all are *one,* because we partake of one bread and with it of the same body of Christ. The apostle goes on to say in verse 18: "Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifice partakers of the altar?" Jews and Gentiles had different religions, and they would not touch each other's sacrifice. If one ate of a Jewish sacrifice, he thereby confessed himself a Jew. If one ate of a heathen sacrifice, he thereby confessed himself an adherent of the heathen religion. At what altar a man worships, that religion he professes. This is a self-evident truth, and Paul therefore says: "For we, being many, are one bread and one body; for we are all partakers of that one bread."

The Lord's Supper is a testimony of the communion of faith. With those with whom I commune I confess to be one in religion and faith. By partaking of this Sacrament in the Lutheran Church, we confess our Lutheran faith. Those who commune together are to be one in faith, and only such are to commune together. When, therefore, members of a false Church wish to commune with us, we must say: We are of a different faith, and we cannot commune together at the same altar as though we were one in faith. Those communing together are to be one, which requires that they be one in doctrine and faith. To Luther mixed, or open, Communion was an abomination. Let us never forget that it is a confession of faith when we approach the Lord's Table. We cannot commune with those who deny the real presence of Christ's body and blood.

Prayer.

O Thou dear Savior of the world, keep in remembrance Thy faithfulness and satisfy my heart with Thy grace. How gladly I would appear before Thee in perfect faith and with due reverence and fervent devotion! But how am I to do this except by and through Thee, Thou Author and Finisher of my faith? Grant me, therefore, to do what is well-pleasing to Thee. Let me always confess Thee before men, and let me remain steadfast in the confession of Thy pure Word and Sacrament unto the end. Amen.

And Thou, O Holy Spirit,
My Comforter and Guide,
Grant that in Jesus' merit
I always may confide,

Him to the end confessing
Whom I have known by faith.
Give me Thy constant blessing
And grant a Christian death.

304. Christians Are the Salt of the Earth.

Ye are the salt of the earth; but if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men. *Matt. 5, 13.*

Salt is an active principle; it works and purifies and diffuses its savoring properties. So Christians are the salt of the world, for they are the very pith and marrow of all true moral influence. By their good example Christians bring it about that the children of this world display more natural uprightness and faithfulness in the works of civil and state life. Indeed, Christians are the cause of all divine blessings on earth. If they do what is right for them, they can bring it about that the nation in which they are strewed as a salt does not become corrupt or ruined. Thus God said of Sodom: "If I find in Sodom fifty righteous within the city, I will spare all the place for their sakes"; and He finally agreed not to destroy the place for the sake of ten righteous people. We know that the great city of Nineveh owed its deliverance to the fact that its inhabitants repented; and certainly after their repentance they were true children of God, the salt of that country. In this manner we are also to understand those passages of Scripture in which a nation is commanded to repent and a blessing is promised to such as do this, but a curse is hurled at those who refuse to do so. Of course, only those who repent are Christians. Only they are called the salt of the earth.

If the Christians are not the foundation, the props and pillars, of a nation, its free institutions will be trampled under the ruthless foot of the mob of those who bring about a condition of anarchy. "But if the salt have lost his savor, wherewith shall it be salted? It is henceforth good for nothing but to be cast out and to be trodden under foot of men," says Jesus. If Christians are not true to their calling, if they no longer testify of Christ and do not confess Him before men, they are good for nothing in the kingdom of Christ and surely will not themselves remain in His kingdom, but be cast out. How careful we should therefore be not to lose our savor as the salt of the world! Let our conversation be honest among them.

Prayer.

Lord, teach us to do according to Thy good pleasure, and Thy good Spirit lead us into the land of uprightness, so that we may walk before Thee in faith, patience, and hope, in godliness, honesty, and forbearance, in meekness, chastity and all Christian virtues; and when we commit sin, chasten us like a father; when our sins cause us anxiety, comfort us with Thy grace, and Thy joyful Spirit uphold us. The unbelieving children of this world find the greatest pleasure in alluring us to sin. How they do rejoice when they succeed in causing a Christian to fall! O Lord, let us not lose our savor as the salt of the world! Amen.

Lives of Christians all remind us,
We can make our lives sublime
And, departing, leave behind us
Footprints on the sands of time.

305. Christians Are the Light of the World.

Ye are the light of the world. A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid. *Matt. 5, 14.*

The sun shines by his own inherent light, the moon by means of borrowed light. In itself a dark body, the moon shines only because the light of the sun falls upon it and is reflected from it. So man, in and of himself, is not a light; he is darkness.

How can man get light, true heavenly light? To have light, light in the hour of death, light unto eternal life, you must seek and embrace Jesus, the Redeemer of mankind, as your Redeemer, your Savior, your Righteousness. You must recognize Him as the Ransom and Propitiation for your sins, as the Wisdom of God and the Way to the Father. Here you see in what sense Christians are the light of the world. They have their light from Christ.

Now, for what purpose did Christ give Christians His light? He says: "Let your light shine before men." They should give light to the world. "A city that is set on an hill cannot be hid." A man cannot be a Christian secretly, without ever showing it or letting any one know it. It is a delusion if a man thinks he might be a Christian for himself and need not join the church or make a public confession of his faith. The Lord says: "Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but on a candlestick, and it giveth light unto all that are in the house." A candle, or lamp, under a bushel would be of no advantage to any one. A light locked up in a cupboard would leave the house in darkness. We Christians are meant to be lights that can be seen. A city on a hill can easily be seen from all sides, so that a traveler can readily find it. Thus the City of God, that is, the Christian Church, should by word and work be known in the world, so that all can wend their way towards it, enter its gates, and find shelter, safety, and salvation there. And Jesus says of the Christians: "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works." Then also others will come, believe in Christ, and thereby glorify our Father in heaven.

Prayer.

O dearest Jesus, let mine eyes ever be directed towards Thee, Thou welcome Light of the world, and see in Thee their only joy. Kindle within me the light of the knowledge of Thy holy will and an unshakable confidence in Thy precious merits; and grant that I may cause this light to shine forth before men by my good works. Let me, O dearest Savior, confess Thy name before the world, be an example to my fellow-men, and lead a truly Christian life in word and deed, in peace and unity, in humility and meekness, and ever praise Thee. Amen.

Lord, I will tell, while I am living,
Thy goodness forth with every breath
And greet each morning with thanksgiving
Until my heart is still in death;
Yea, when at last my lips grow cold,
Thy praise shall in my sighs be told.

306. Preach the Gospel to Every Creature.

Go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. He that believeth and is baptized shall be saved; but he that believeth not shall be damned. *Mark 16, 15. 16.*

The chief mission of the Church is to proclaim the true Gospel of Christ, which is the only means by which immortal souls are saved and made members of the everlasting kingdom of God. And this must always continue to be the chief mission of the Church, as long as it deserves to bear that name.

But is it not an impossible task to preach the Gospel to every creature? It must be admitted that it is a difficult, a great, a gigantic task. Shall we, then, retreat and follow those who already have begun the retreat? No; we cannot, we dare not; for the Captain of our salvation says: "Go!" and this one word from His majestic lips ought to settle the matter for us. And is there not a dire necessity for us to go? A fact that we constantly should remember is that two-thirds of the world's people still languish in the darkness of heathendom. What are you doing that the command of Christ may be fulfilled: "Go ye and make disciples of all nations"? Or do you think that the execution of the Lord's orders is beyond our resources? That is a reasonable question. But is that the way of the Lord, to give an order that cannot be obeyed? Does He command us to do a task and then absent Himself? No; He is with us always when we go to bring the Gospel to the nations. He is in the field before us; He anticipates our coming. "All things are ready." And our spiritual resources are fully efficient, complete, and powerful. Wherever this Gospel has been preached, it has been the means of bringing sinners to Christ and to salvation; wherever this Gospel has been proclaimed, it has overthrown the idols and has reared altars of praise and adoration to the true God. How, then, is it with our material resources? Are we giving all we might and all we can to bring more people under the blessed influence of the Gospel? Can we honestly answer the Lord face to face and say, "I am doing all I can for Thee"?

Prayer.

O Lord Jesus, we are not worthy of the least of Thy mercies and Thy truth, but we pray Thee with a humble heart, remain with us also in future with the divine Word and the holy Sacraments, that the Gospel may be preached to every creature, that Thy holy name may be known among the nations, be alone feared and honored, and we all live according to Thy divine pleasure, and serve Thee, and win souls for Thy blessed kingdom. Amen.

Have ye carried the living water
To the parched and thirsty soul?
Have ye said to the sick and wounded,
"Jesus Christ can make thee whole"?
Have ye told My fainting children
Of the strength of the Father's hand?
Have ye guided the tottering footsteps
To the shore of the Golden Land?

307. It Is the Duty of Every Christian to Do Mission-Work.

Ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people, that ye should show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light.
1 Pet. 2, 9.

Whoever has really experienced the saving and gladdening power of the Gospel cannot keep it to himself. He will become a missionary, proclaiming to his fellow-men: I have found the Savior. When John the Baptist had found the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sins of the world, he at once directed Andrew to Him. Andrew, in turn, speedily invited his brother Peter to come to Jesus. And when Philip had seen the glory of the Redeemer, he hesitated not a moment to call Nathanael to Christ. As soon as man has become a believer in Christ, he knows that the Gospel is good tidings, for he has experienced what the Gospel has done for him. The happiness enjoyed by him he wants to bring and impart to those of his fellow-men who are still without the Gospel. Do you not feel that it is your sacred duty to help others as you have been helped? Is not your heart filled with compassion when you see or read of the many redeemed souls walking the broad way that leads to everlasting torments?

You, too, can do mission-work in the proper sense of the term. You can lead sinners to Christ. The weakest among us have a gift, however seemingly small, which is peculiar to him and which he can use. And if he can, he ought to do so. Look about you in your church. You will find people such as Christ found in the church at Sardis who have a name that they live, but are dead. You will find some that have a weak faith, are lacking in knowledge, and are not zealous in good works. You will find some who are not attending the services as they should, who are drifting more and more with the world. Go to them, admonish them, lead them back to Christ. When a stranger comes to church, welcome him in your midst. When a Lutheran family moves into your neighborhood, visit it, invite all its members to your church, and call your pastor's attention to them. Bring the stranger to your church. Help the pastor in his work of seeking straying and lost sheep. It is mission-work. **Look upon it as a most important Christian duty.**

Prayer.

O Thou Savior of all men, we are Thy spiritual handiwork in Thy Church, and Thou art the Lord of the harvest; therefore we pray Thee to send laborers into Thy vineyard and cause also Thy harvest of men to be abundant at all places. Grant that everywhere good seed be sown on Thy fields and that every Christian take an active part in mission-work. Let us all regard mission-work as the one big, important duty of our lives. Amen.

Wanted! young hands to labor;
The fields are broad and wide,
And harvest waits the reaper
Around on every side.
None are too poor or lowly,
None are too weak or small,
For in His service holy
The Master needs them all.

308. Christian Beneficence.

As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith. *Gal. 6, 10.*

Our church-papers come to us with strong appeals for help. These appeals are voiced from the pulpit and in our various meetings. In the face of the dire need existing and of the earnest appeals brought to our notice, it is absolutely wrong for Christians to discourage one another in exercising their Christian duties. We should rather endeavor to be trees filled with fruits of righteousness and consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works. "As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith." This, too, will help us faithfully to conform our lives to the rule of the divine Word and to walk as it becometh the Gospel of Christ. The world is very quick to see whether we live according to the profession of our lips or not. The unbeliever has no respect for a Christianity that is indifferent, selfish, close, cold or hard.

When asked by Christ which of those three, the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan, had acted as a neighbor to the one who had fallen among the thieves, the lawyer immediately pointed out the Samaritan. We owe it to the mercy of God that we have a Savior. How, then, can we be unmerciful to our fellow-men? Be merciful to others as your Father is merciful to you. "Give, and it shall be given unto you." Collections are necessary for carrying on church-work; the poor must be supported, orphans housed, the sick looked after, students educated, buildings kept in repair. The heavenly Father gave you all you need for the support of your body and life, "good measure, pressed down, and shaken together, and running over"; He gave you His dear Son, and in Him all that will make you truly happy. Oh, how willing should you be to give! Blessed is he who has learned to be a cheerful giver. The more he gives, the more he will receive. But he who sows sparingly will also reap sparingly; being unmerciful, he will receive a bitter fruit.

Prayer.

O merciful God and Father, we pray Thee, forgive all our sins wherewith in the past years we have transgressed against Thee, either by doing what was wrong or by failing to do what was right. Cancel, we pray Thee, our sins of the past years with the blood of Thy dear Son, and in order to render us worthy of this grace, engender in our hearts true repentance, lest we carry any unforgiven sins over into the future. Forgive us our sins of omission. Make us willing to do good to all men. Let us be merciful and kind to others, exercising and showing truly Christian beneficence. Amen.

Day by day for Christ we find
Some sweet task to do;
Patient, loving, tender, kind,
Little helpers true.

309. Our Lutheran Forefathers.

Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the Word of God; whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation. *Heb. 13, 7.*

It is about a thousand years since the Gospel was first brought to our forefathers while they were sitting in the darkness of idolatry. Sad to say, it was a corrupted Gospel; for the Pope had already introduced many of his idolatries into the Church. But in the sixteenth century, God granted the full light of the Gospel truth to the nations of Northwestern Europe. Luther broke with the abuses and falsehoods with which the Apostolic Church had been corrupted and restored the Church to its pristine purity. But later the light of the Gospel was again darkened in the land of the

Reformation. There was no religious freedom, the state church, filled with false professions of all kinds, reigned supreme and persecuted those who confessed the Biblical Lutheran truth. The life of most of the fathers was made so burdensome to them that they felt constrained to leave the country of their birth.

America was destined to become the paradise of the Lutheran Church. What better land could God have invited her to than this? What opportunities were lacking for her to carry out her principles of a free Church built upon the foundation of religious liberty? The greatest spiritual blessing of our land is religious liberty, in consequence of which we can worship God according to the dictates of our own conscience.

Our fathers, who left their native land and came to this country because they were harassed and persecuted in the old country for the reason that their conscience would not permit them to remain in the state church, have taught us highly to value this blessing of religious freedom. And our fathers made full use of this freedom. As soon as they came over to America, schoolhouses and colleges were reared by them side by side with the churches; indeed, in many instances the school came first, and from it grew the church.

We ought to continue the work which our fathers began. Our testimony for the truth has not been in vain. God has prospered us greatly and will continue to do so, unless we become ungrateful.

Prayer.

Faithful Redeemer, keep us and our descendants in the blessed knowledge of Thy Gospel to the end of time and so guide and lead us by Thy Holy Spirit that we no longer, like the heathen, walk in the vanity of our minds and according to our own lusts, but lead a godly life, as the children of life, and serve Thee in due obedience as our King all the days of our lives. And when our confession arouses opposition and we must encounter much hostility, let us not be discouraged, for the cause belongs to Thee, our Redeemer. Amen.

Be of good cheer; your cause belongs
To Him who can avenge your wrongs;
Leave it to Him, our Lord.
Though hidden yet from mortal eyes,
His Gideon shall for you arise,
Uphold you and His Word.

310. A Synod and Its Work.

The Lord hath done great things for us, whereof we are glad.
Ps. 126, 3.

Besides your church and school there is also the synod to which you and your congregation belong. It consists of many congregations, joined for the purpose of doing mission-work. For your congregation alone cannot preach the Gospel in all the world, but a large number of congregations can easily do it. When our Lutheran Zion was transplanted to this Western Hemisphere, she numbered but a few pastors and some hundred souls. But, lo! to-day she has thousands of pastors, who are fighting the Lord's battles, and over a million souls. From this marvelous growth of our Church it is apparent that the Lord loves the gates of His Lutheran Zion. We praise the Lord for the wonderful visitations of His grace. Despite the fact that we are clearly living in the latter days, in the days of infidelity, of scoffers, and of love waxing cold, we experience that God's Word is preached in our midst in such purity as has been seldom attained since the time of the apostles. While the rule in earlier centuries was that whoever preached and practised the truth with all his heart was hated, persecuted, and soon found himself in a very small minority, we have experienced the exceptional grace that such preaching and practise have been attended by a phenomenal success, so that the Lutheran Church of our country has outstripped all others in rate of growth. Men who immigrated to this country, their minds imbued with error, were here led to a knowledge of the truth as it was restored at the time of the Reformation. Then God used these men as instruments for the upbuilding of a great Church, which holds, confesses, and proclaims Luther's doctrine in all its purity. And unto this day God is granting to the testimony of Luther's doctrine pure victory after victory. The world stands in need of just such a Church.

The strength of a Church lies in its faithful adherence to the Word of God. And this is the grand privilege we have enjoyed. By God's grace we have the knowledge of the full Gospel truth. May the Lord always keep us in His truth!

Prayer.

O Thou eternal God and faithful Father, we render Thee humble thanks for all the spiritual benefits received at Thy hands during the past years of our lives. Thou hast suffered us to retain Thy holy Word and the public preaching thereof, together with the holy Sacraments, while we, by our ingratitude, have fully deserved that we should be deprived of such blessings; for we are not at all worthy of all the mercies Thou hast shown us. Grant grace that the truth may become a living knowledge among us, which praises Thee by its fruits. We have been taught the truth from our youth, and our lives have fallen in a time of peculiar grace. Amen.

It is time to be brave. It is time to be true.
It is time to be finding the thing you can do.
It is time to put by the dream and the sigh
And work for the cause that is holy and high.

311. The Importance of Parochial Schools.

Ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath, but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. *Eph. 6, 4.*

True education means the training not only of the intellect, but also of the heart. Without religion a man cannot be lifted to a higher moral plane. There can be no true morality without Christian doctrines. For this reason, then, the Church must be active in building Christian schools and colleges.

Also the Sunday-school and the confirmation class spend all their time in the consideration of the Word of God. But it is well to consider whether these institutions do really suffice. It is not astonishing that the religious spirit is on the wane in our country, since thousands of churches rest content with such meager spiritual food as the Sunday-school can furnish their children. And even confirmation classes are not sufficient if the children come to the pastor without the most elementary knowledge of spiritual things; for even if the pastor makes the most earnest efforts, he cannot succeed in teaching the children all that Christ has commanded us in the course of a few months. Religious schools for Christian children must be our watchword if we desire to fulfil our duty and to give our children what they need. Not schools where religion should be taught to the exclusion of all other knowledge, but schools in which religion shall also pervade all other instruction, being the divine force which controls the entire school. In such schools alone may we hope to educate our children as God would have it, bringing them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. With such school system it will be a rare thing to find a child fifteen years old which does not sufficiently know what to believe, how to live, and how to die in order to be saved. There is no other church which lays so much stress on a thorough Christian education as our Evangelical Lutheran Church does and always did.

Prayer.

Beloved God and Father, bless our parochial schools, prosper all that our pastors and teachers do for them. But above all help every father and mother to realize the great necessity, the sweetness, and the sublime opportunity of their calling that puts God's own children under their care and enables them, lest they lose them, to lead them into the temple of the living God. Help us to lead them to Jesus to be blessed in time and eternity. Amen.

"Now, why should you hinder the Master,"
Said Peter, "with children like these?
You see how from morning till evening
He teacheth and healeth disease."
Then Christ said, "Forbid not the children,
Permit them to come unto Me!
Of such is the kingdom of heaven," —
And He blessed them and filled them with glee.

312. Youth Is the Most Favorable Season to Begin a Christian Life.

Remember, now, thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not nor the years draw nigh when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them. *Eccl. 12, 1.*

The sweetest time of our life is the time of our childhood and youth. In comparison with youth every other age is made up of evil days and years that have no pleasure in them. Youth is the springtime of life. As spring, with its fragrant flowers and buds and its mild sunshine, is the most pleasant season, so childhood and youth is the most favorable season in life. For youth is the time when the foundation is laid for life. Do not think only of this life, however, and what it may have in store for you. While you are laying the foundation for your later life on this earth, lay also the foundation for the life to come. Begin to lead a Christian life. Already in Holy Baptism, through your sponsors, and on the day of your confirmation, you vowed that you would remain faithful to your God and Savior. Therefore now, in your youth, lay a firm foundation for a sincere Christian life. Sow your seed in the morning of life. The youthful heart is soft soil. A young tree is easily bent. Let the young tree of your life bring forth good fruit in due season. Lay up a treasure for the evil days and for the years that will offer few pleasures to you. In youth the Christian character must be established; decide now for God and against the world; now enter the road which determines our future destiny.

Many would give their youth to the devil and give to God their feeble and tottering old age. Is that fair? And do you not think that the devil will manage to hold what has been given him in youth? Would you thank any one to offer you the shell without the kernel, or the stalk without the flower, or a purse without the money? And do you think God is pleased with the dregs of the cup, the last declining years of a man's life? There are old people who turned to God in true repentance and were saved; but such are exceptions and not the rule. The rule is: As in youth, so in age, and so in death. It is hard to bend an old tree. Therefore remember thy Creator in the days of thy youth. Build not only for the days of summer, but also for the cold blasts of winter.

Prayer.

O God the Holy Spirit, renew me as to the inner man that I may not take any old sin or impurity over into the future, but begin a new Christian life this day and receive not Thy grace in vain and thus be well prepared for old age. Let me not postpone my repentance until the evil days come and the years draw nigh when I shall say, I have no pleasure in them. Let me not employ my time and talents, my health and my strength, to serve Satan, the world, and the flesh and then ask Thee to gather among the stubble after the enemy has taken away the harvest. Let me remember Thee in the days of my youth. Amen.

Lord, to Thee, to Thee, I come
In life's tender early bloom;
Breathe on me Thy grace divine,
Touch my heart and make it Thine!

313. Our Colleges and Seminaries.

Let us not be weary in well-doing; for in due season we shall reap if we faint not. *Gal. 6, 9.*

With the dawn of the Reformation learning and thought received a new impulse. Everywhere under the new sunlight of the Gospel there revived interest for institutions of popular education. Luther labored with great earnestness and vigor for the reformation of the schools and for a thorough instruction of the young both in religious and in secular knowledge.

From its very beginning our Church has been active in building Christian schools and colleges. In the midst of all the hardships and poverty which the new colonists had to suffer, they organized schools of learning in which religion, Latin, Greek, Hebrew, German, French, English, history, geography, mathematics, natural philosophy, natural history, mental philosophy, music, and drawing were to be taught, and often in very humble buildings these schools were opened. Out of these small beginnings grew, as it were, many seminaries and colleges. In these institutions of learning thousands of students are enrolled, and these are taught by over a hundred teachers. Surely, a phenomenal growth, not equaled in the history of any other denomination in this or any other country of the world. God has prospered us most bounteously. The little acorn has grown to be a mighty oak, which spreads its branches from shore to shore of this our blessed country, up to Canada, down to South America, and over to England, Germany, India, Australia, and China. The glorious blessing of our colleges and seminaries every year is carried all over the world. Far over a hundred candidates for the ministry leave our seminaries every year. Every Sunday many thousands of our dear Lutheran Christians pray in our public services that God would here and everywhere bless the institutions of the true faith in which faithful laborers for His vineyard are prepared. These same Lutheran institutions are the strongest bulwark this country has over against all enemies of our liberties.

Prayer.

Almighty, eternal, and beneficent God, we give unto Thee hearty thanks and praise for Thy most gracious aid and assistance; for without Thee we surely could have done nothing; therefore all praise properly belongs to Thee. And we pray Thee, deign to be pleased with our work and have it tend to the welfare, in body and soul, of ourselves and our fellow-men; through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

O ye, with blessings falling
As dust from goldenrod,
Oh, heed the earnest calling
For temples of your God;

Oh, from your well-filled coffers
Lend silver to the Lord
And be the hand that proffers
The Sacrament and Word.

314. What Kind of Men We Need.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary, the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour; whom resist steadfast in the faith. *1 Pet. 5, 8. 9.*

In this age of ours we need strong men, strong in the Lord, and in the power of His might, able to stand against the wiles of the devil, vigilant to fight against the powers of infidelity. We need men who are thoroughly convinced that what they confess is indeed the truth. They must receive Jesus with their whole heart and give it to Jesus. They must be men of holy zeal, energy, and enthusiasm, men who are not daunted by any difficulty that may arise in their path, men of a stout heart and true, who, turning from the paths of worldly ambition, cast the lot of their life unhesitatingly for Christ and His kingdom. We need men who will not falter or turn back, but who will bear the standard of Christ, the Gospel, into every city and town, every forest and plain, every vale and mountain, of this our glorious country, to every creature in the world. We need men who have the good will and are filled with zeal to do this for Christ's sake, who are willing to say in all sincerity: "For me to live is Christ"; men who are willing to dedicate their whole life to His service, willing to serve Him with all the powers of body and soul. Christ has need of thoroughly consecrated men; men *in* the world, but not *of* the world, who are like the gulf stream in the ocean. Such men we need to-day,— children of God, who go through the world without mixing with the surrounding element, but who retain their own peculiarity and identity, and spread the warm influence of their Christian personality round about them.

Oh, how much they will find to do in the service of their Master! And what power for good such men are! Who can measure the wholesome influence that goes out from them? Who, then, is willing to consecrate himself and his service to the Lord? Who will speak the truth without fear or favor, to high and low?

Prayer.

Do Thou grant grace, O God, that a firm foundation of the knowledge of Thy revealed truth be laid among us, so that it may become a living knowledge, which praises Thee by its fruits. Grant that we be strong in the Lord and in the power of His might. Let us watch and pray, be sober and vigilant, steadfast in the faith, separated from the world; for Thy Church needs men who belong to Thee and are guided by different principles and inspired by different motives than the unbelieving children of this world. Make us able also to conquer the self-righteous to whom the Gospel of free grace is a stumbling-block. Amen.

Boldly, my soul, no dangers fear,
Thy Savior's arm is ever near;
Rather than His dear name deny,
Seek Thou His strength for Him to die.

315. Our Mission-Fields.

Behold, I say unto you, Lift up your eyes and look on the fields; for they are white already to harvest. *John 4, 35.*

In our own country we have a greater opportunity than ever to acquaint the English-speaking population with the great blessings which they may enjoy in the Church of the Reformation. The opportunity is unusual. From India, China, Cuba, Brazil, Argentina, from the land which harbored the cradle of the Reformer and in which his voice once proclaimed the sweet Gospel-truth, from well-nigh every quarter of the earth, we hear the call, "Come and help us!" Even now the Lord is testing us whether we will be faithful or prove traitors to our trust. And God's blessing is resting upon our labors; for no Church is enjoying a more rapid growth than ours.

To our fellow-Christians here and in Canada we preach the Gospel at far over a thousand places. As America is the land of many languages, we also have a foreign-language mission with quite a number of mission-stations. We bring the Gospel also to the deaf-mutes. Also to the original inhabitants of this country, to the Indians, the glad tidings of their Savior are proclaimed. Lutheran synods are carrying on missions among the colored people in our country. They do mission-work also among the Jews, as "the Lord is not willing that any should perish."

Besides these missions in our own country we have an extensive mission in foreign countries, especially that already mentioned in South America and Asia. Our congregations in London, Germany, and Denmark are called the European Free-Church. In Australia there is a whole Lutheran synod of about a hundred pastors and teachers who are of the same faith as we. Surely God has abundantly blessed our missionary work. He has set before us an open door, and no man can shut it.

Prayer.

O merciful God and Father, preserve unto us also in the future Thy holy Word and Thy Sacraments and thus the kingdom of Thy Son and do not suffer the enemy to deprive us of this great blessing and to extend his kingdom of darkness among us. Preserve all our faithful teachers and preachers, whom Thou hast given us, and bestow upon them Thy divine blessing and the power of Thy Holy Spirit that they may proclaim Thy Word in its truth and purity to every creature. Amen.

Let none hear you idly saying,
"There is nothing I can do,"
While the souls of men are dying
And the Master calls for you.
Take the task He gives you gladly,
Let His work your pleasure be;
Answer quickly when He calleth,
"Here am I; send me, send me!"

316. Christ's Charge to All His Followers to Be Witnesses to Him.

And ye also shall bear witness because ye have been with Me from the beginning. *John 15, 27.*

The apostles were to be witnesses of their Lord "in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth." They were to bring the divine message of the Gospel to a lost world. The duty for which they were thus commissioned involved great hardships. The times were evil. Idolatry permeated the nations. It was interwoven with their legislation, philosophy, literature, and art, influenced all popular feeling, and was intrenched in the heart and life of the people. Against all this the Gospel was a protest. Those who proclaimed it had to attack all that the heathen held most sacred, but which held them in the power of Satan. The schools, the religions, the traditions, the laws, the prejudices, and all the activities of the heathen were against them.

It is not so bad now. But the offense of the Cross has not ceased. The battle between Christ and Antichrist still rages. The devil is still the god of this world, and he still stirs to put the witnesses of Christ under the ban. And from the spirit which still shows itself we may judge how it was when all the world was of one mind against the Gospel and see how great was the danger that God's witnesses might yield or become ashamed of the testimony they were divinely called to give.

The children of this world cannot bear to hear Christians telling them that they are sinners, murderers of their own souls, going to perdition. Such doctrine the self-righteousness of man is ever ready to reject. But still Christ commands: *"Ye also shall bear witness."* This witness rests on the work of His redemption, and hence the divine power of the Gospel is manifested by it. Wherever this Gospel is proclaimed, paganism begins to vanish; the glories of idolatry grow dim; the splendor of the heathen temples fades. Shall we, then, be ashamed of the testimony of our Lord? Shall we flinch and refuse to be His witnesses?

Prayer.

Christ, our dear Lord and Savior, grant us grace that we may not fall into temptation. Keep us pure and blameless, in the simplicity of the true faith, and deliver us from all evil, from the kingdom of Satan, and from the wicked world. Let us not be ashamed to bear testimony to the truth, to be witnesses of Thee. By the foolishness of preaching it hath pleased Thee to destroy the wisdom of the wise and to bring to naught the understanding of the prudent. To Thee be thanks and praise forever! Amen.

Oh, what a Savior, gracious to all,
Oh, how His blessings around us fall!
Gently to comfort, willing to cheer.
Sleeping or waking, Jesus is near.
Praise our Redeemer, reigning above;
Witness of Jesus, tell of His love;
Tell of His mercy, boundless and free;
No one can save us, Lord God, like Thee.

317. "Lo, I Am with You Alway."

They shall fight against thee, but they shall not prevail against thee; for I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee. *Jer. 1, 19.*

What a comfort it is for us Christians to know that we always have some one near us who is ever ready to protect us from harm and danger and in whom we can fully trust. And especially is it comforting for us to know that we have such a Friend near us when we take an important step in life, and do not know whither it may lead us. Often we do something which will influence our whole future life and bring to us, as it has brought to many before us, both weal and woe. We do not know how much of each it will bring to us; this is hidden from our eyes. But, be it little of the one and much of the other, we, as Christians, have the assurance that we have One with us who will be our constant Companion and Friend, who will guide, lead, and protect us, that, whether it be weal or woe, all will be well with us if we but trust in Him. Whatever we do, whatever we undertake, according to the will of God, we Christians have this confidence, that the Lord is with us.

Once the Lord dwelt visibly with His disciples in Palestine, walking with them, teaching and consoling them. And He is still present with us, though invisibly. Before He ascended into heaven, He said to His disciples: "All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. Go ye, therefore, and teach," that is, disciple, "all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. And, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." This is indeed a most precious promise. Jesus, their blessed Savior, is always present with His disciples with His divine grace. Therefore they have everything and have no reason to fear anything. And He is just as anxious to help all His disciples now as He was when He walked visibly on earth. How blessed you are because you are a disciple of Jesus! He to whom all power is given in heaven and in earth is your Savior. And He is with you with His grace every day.

Prayer.

O Lord, Thou faithful Savior, who canst not lie, Thou hast said: "Lo, I am with you alway." Therefore, O Lord, bless us with Thy gracious presence! Be merciful to us poor sinners! Do not let Thy wrath over our sin shut out Thy compassion; do not take Thy grace and mercy from us. Preserve us from dearth of bread; but above all give us at all times the wholesome Bread of Life. Thus we shall see that we are truly Thy children, for whom Thou dost faithfully provide, and honor and praise Thee as our Redeemer and Savior all the days of our lives. And when our last hour has come, even then be with us. "I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me." Amen.

I need Thy presence every passing hour;
What but Thy grace can foil the tempter's power?
Who, like Thyself, my guide and stay can be?
Through cloud and sunshine, oh, abide with me!

318. "O Give Thanks unto the Lord!"

Bless the Lord, O my soul; and all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits. *Ps. 103, 1. 2.*

If we wish to retain the blessings of the Reformation, we must be grateful for them. That we possess them is due to no merit of our own. We owe it entirely to God's grace. But God's grace will not forever remain with the ungrateful. One of the most stirring passages Luther ever penned is that in which he showed his people how the Gospel in the past has often been withdrawn from those who proved themselves ungrateful. "Palestine and the Orient had it; but gone is gone, they now have the Turk. Rome and the Latin country had it; but gone is gone, they now have the Pope." At the present time, four hundred years after the Reformation, we must add: Germany had it; but gone is gone, they now have the state church, filled with worldlings and infidels. To us here in this New World God has been more gracious than ever before since the time of Christ Himself. But unless we prove more grateful than our predecessors, gone will be gone, and we, too, shall lose the great blessings of the Reformation.

Let us, therefore, appreciate what God has given us. Let us live and love as people whose hearts are filled with God's boundless grace. We have the truth of the pure and unadulterated Gospel. Forgiveness of sins, life, and salvation was freely preached to us and made ours by faith. Oh, how we should thank our God that, despite our ingratitude, our indifference, and our lack of due appreciation, He has preserved His Word, His precious Gospel, to us in its purity all these many years!

Oh, therefore give thanks unto the Lord! Labor for the Lord prompted by gratitude. You should feel as though you could not do enough for Him, since He has done so much for you. And God has promised His children that they will be abundantly rewarded for all the labor they perform in His kingdom. His grace and mercy is so bountiful that He gives them not only eternal life for the sake of His beloved Son, but also additional glory in heaven, according to the pleasure of His grace.

Prayer.

O gracious and loving Father in heaven, grant that we may recognize all Thy blessings to be the result of Thy goodness, so that we may render Thee heartfelt thanks. Continue to visit our Lutheran Zion with Thy grace; develop and enrich it. Let the Sun of Righteousness give warmth to the soil of many hearts and send a plentiful rain, the Water of Life, into the barren hearts; water the furrows and moisten the plowed ground; give Thine increase to our spiritual harvest, so that our mission-fields may continue to yield abundant crops, to the end that many may come to the knowledge of the truth and that we may shout for joy and sing Thy praise forevermore. Amen.

Praise God, from whom all blessings flow;
Praise Him, all creatures here below;
Praise Him above, ye heavenly host:
Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost!

Morning Prayers.

I thank Thee, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast kept me this night from all harm and danger; and I pray Thee that Thou wouldst keep me this day also from sin and every evil that all my doings and life may please Thee. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me that the wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

In Thy name, Thou crucified Lord Jesus Christ, I, a poor sinner, have now arisen. On the sacred cross, Thou, the innocent and holy Lamb of sacrifice, didst endure for me the most painful death and didst redeem me with Thy crimson blood from all my sins, from death, Satan, and hell. Govern my heart by Thy Holy Spirit, refresh it with the heavenly dew of Thy grace, keep me this day with Thy divine love, and hide me, body and soul, in Thy holy wounds; cleanse me from all my sins, preserve me in all good works, and guide me out of this vale of tears into Thine eternal joy and glory, O most faithful Savior, Jesus Christ, my only Comfort, Hope, and Life. Amen.

Evening Prayers.

I thank Thee, my heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, Thy dear Son, that Thou hast graciously kept me this day; and I pray Thee that Thou wouldst forgive me all my sins where I have done wrong and graciously keep me this night. For into Thy hands I commend myself, my body and soul, and all things. Let Thy holy angel be with me that the wicked Foe may have no power over me. Amen.

O Lord Jesus Christ, Thou patient sacrificial Lamb, who hast made atonement for all my sins, and not only for my sins, but for the sins of the whole world, to Thee I again render thanks from mine inmost heart for having, like a father, protected me, both body and soul, this day; and I pray Thee graciously to pardon and forgive me all my sins which this day I have committed because of the weakness of my corrupt nature and at the instigation of the Evil One. They weigh heavily upon my heart and conscience, and I long to have them washed away by Thy blood. And since I am now about to retire, to rest and to sleep, I pray Thee Thou wouldest spread the wings of Thy grace over me that I may sleep beneath them in peace and quietness as to the body, but with the soul watching alway, looking for Thee and Thy glorious coming to Judgment, and sighing for that hour when I shall be called hence to be with Thee in eternal bliss. Grant this, I beseech Thee, for the sake of Thy atoning sacrifice, blessed forever together with the Father and the Holy Spirit! Amen.

Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to keep;
If I should die before I wake,
I pray Thee, Lord, my soul to take;
And this I ask for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Jesus' blood and righteousness
My jewels are, my glorious dress,
Wherein before my God I'll stand
When I shall reach the heavenly land.

I am but a little child,
Make my heart both pure and mild;
Thus a temple it shall be
Fitted only, Lord, for Thee.

Lord Jesus, who dost love me,
O spread Thy wings above me
And shield me from alarm;
Though Satan would devour me,
Let angel-guards sing o'er me:
"This child of God shall meet no harm."

My Father dear, I pray to Thee,
A godly child wouldst make of me.
But should my life to sin be given,
Oh, take me early into heaven
And like an angel make me there.
Hear, Lord, for Jesus' sake, my prayer!

Dear heavenly Father, make me Thine
That heaven may be forever mine.

Grace Before Meal.

Lord God, heavenly Father, bless us and these Thy gifts which we receive from Thy bountiful goodness, through Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen.

The eyes of all wait upon Thee, O Lord, and Thou givest them their meat in due season. Thou openest Thine hand and satisfiest the desire of every living thing.

Come, Lord Jesus, be our Guest
And let Thy gifts to us be blest. Amen.

Grace After Meal.

We thank Thee, Lord God, heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ, our Lord, for all Thy benefits, who livest and reignest forever and ever. Amen.

Our God we thank
For meat and drink
Through Jesus Christ. Amen.

The Lord's Prayer.

Our Father who art in heaven; Hallowed be Thy name; Thy kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven; Give us this day our daily bread; And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us; And lead us not into temptation; But deliver us from evil; For Thine is the kingdom and the power and the glory forever and ever. Amen.

The Lord bless us and keep us.

The Lord make His face shine upon us and be gracious unto us.

The Lord lift up His countenance upon us, and give us peace. Amen.